

Saint Brigid, Patroness of Ireland



by Father Joseph A Knowles

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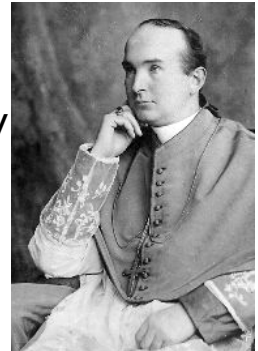
by Father Joseph A Knowles

Bishop's Preface

Braganza House, Carlow,
8th May 1907

My Dear Father Knowles,

You have placed, not alone the Sisters of Saint Brigid and the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, but also Irishmen and Irishwomen wherever they may be, under a deep debt of gratitude to you by the very interesting Life of their great Patroness which you have just given them. As Bishop of the Diocese of Kildare I wish to thank you most cordially, and to congratulate you upon the great success which has attended your efforts to produce a Life worthy of that noble woman within the very limited time at your disposal. It requires but a very slight acquaintance with the difficulties which surrounded the subject to enable me to appreciate the magnitude of the task which you so kindly undertook in order to provide the good Sisters of Saint Brigid with a fitting Souvenir of the Centenary celebration of their Institute. You have succeeded in producing a very readable, edifying, and instructive Life, of the Irish Saint who was second only to Saint Patrick himself. Doubtless, it would have greatly helped you had something in the line of critical examination of the sources preceded the writing of the Life; the number of legends which cluster round the memory of the Saint would have been reduced to reasonable dimensions, and the historical student would not be disposed to withhold his assent so frequently as he may feel inclined to do when perusing your pages. But you had no time for such an examination, and I feel confident that the devout clients of Saint Brigid at home



and abroad will read your work with great pleasure and profit, and will thank you for bringing within their reach the only Life of Saint Brigid that has any claim to be regarded as complete. Wishing you every happiness and blessing, I am,

My dear Father Knowles,
Yours very gratefully in Christ,
+ Patrick Foley
Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Ireland

* * *

". . . there was no desert, no spot, or hiding-place in the Island, however remote, which was not peopled with perfect monks and nuns; so that, throughout the world, Ireland was justly distinguished by the extraordinary title of the Island of Saints. . . .

". . . in holy mortification of the flesh and renouncement of self-will, rivalling the Monks of Egypt in merits and in numbers, and by word and example they were a light to foreign and distant lands."

- *Bishop Jocelyn, Acta SS. Mart., 17*

Author's Preface

In this volume the Author has endeavoured to place before his readers a concise and popular narration of the life and labours of Saint Brigid, the Patroness of Ireland. The facts and legends, which abound in its pages, he has carefully selected from the most reliable and authentic sources.

The present time seems to him opportune and propitious for the publication of the class of literature to which this volume claims to belong. There exists amongst the Irish reading-public a marked preference for books that deal with the religious or national history of our country. This sound and desirable condition of our literary tastes is mainly attributable to the untiring zeal and efforts of the Gaelic League and other kindred organizations.

The joyous occasion which has called forth this volume may not be passed over in silence. This year the Order of Saint Brigid celebrates the centenary of its foundation. To mark with greater emphasis the glorious event the Brigidine Nuns decided to publish a life of their special Patroness. They were pleased to ask the assistance of the Author in carrying out their pious and laudable design. Conscious of many obligations of gratitude to the spiritual daughters of Saint Brigid, he could not do otherwise than interpret their wish as a command. Hence the appearance of his name on the title-page of this volume.

The Author takes this opportunity of returning his sincere and respectful thanks to the illustrious Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin for his gracious letter of approval, which forms an appropriate and valuable introduction to this volume.

May these pages, the Author fervently prays, tend to deepen the knowledge of the exalted sanctity of Saint Brigid amongst her children, and strengthen their faith in the powerful advocacy of her whom a nation's voice has proclaimed "the Mary of the Gael."

"The Mary of the Gael"

So long as sea
Girdeth this isle, so long thy name
shall hang
In splendour o'er it like the stars of
God.

- *Aubrey De Vere, Legends of Saint Patrick*

The Irish Church has ever been the prolific Mother of saintly children. Her Confessors, her Martyrs, and her Virgins, have shed a lustre and glory on her name that can never fade or
The standard of the true faith had scarcely been planted by Saint Patrick, on the hill of Tara, when a glorious spectacle gladdened his apostolic heart. He beheld a people swiftly casting off the trammels of Paganism and embracing, with a whole-hearted devotion, the rigorous precepts of the Gospel he was sent to teach. And, as if to fill his soul to overflowing with joy and consolation, he saw countless thousands cheerfully embracing the path of perfection, indicated and inculcated by the Evangelical Counsels. Never, in the history of the propagation of the Catholic Faith, was there found a soil more ready for the reception of the blessed seed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, than that of our own dear Isle. In the wide expanse of the dominions of the Catholic Church, Ireland stands alone as a Nation whose conversion, from the darkness of paganism to the full light of the true faith, was accomplished without the shedding of one drop of a Martyr's blood. Saint Patrick went from end to end of our Island preaching the Gospel of peace and good will, without encountering any of the obstacles and trials experienced by



the Apostles of other nations. His apostolate partook more of the nature of a triumphal procession than of a fierce combat with the powers of darkness and superstition. Wherever our Apostle went, crowds flocked round him to hear the doctrines and practices of the New Law preached to them in their own sweet Gaelic tongue. Kings and princes vied with one another to entertain him, and to have his message of love and hope delivered to their peoples. They devoutly acknowledged themselves as willing subjects of the "King of Kings," by asking to have the sacramental waters of Baptism poured upon their heads by the ambassador He had sent to them. The bards, who hitherto had sung the praises of earthly monarchs and worthless deities, now attuned their harps to sweetest hymns in honour of the true God. The wise men and law-givers of the Nation esteemed themselves as little children in the domain of knowledge, until they had mastered the Science of the Saints, taught in the school of Saint Patrick. Ladies of royal and noble birth sat at the feet of the Apostle, to learn the true dignity of womanhood, attained only by the knowledge and practice of Christian virtue.

The Island in a short space of time, from an untitled field thickly strewn with the noxious weeds of error and superstition, was transformed into a perfumed garden of surpassing loveliness, in which the rarest and most beautiful flowers of sanctity grew and flourished. The hand of God seemed raised in special benediction over this favoured land, increasing and multiplying the fruits of Saint Patrick's apostolic zeal and labour. The altars raised to Pagan deities were overthrown and destroyed. The Druidical priesthood cast aside the insignia of their false ministry, and humbly joined the ranks of the converts as simple worshippers in the temples of the living God. Saint Patrick rejoiced and was glad when he beheld the rich and ripe harvest that covered the broad acres of the Irish Church. It seemed as if it were but

yesterday that he had scattered the seed broadcast over the land, and now the harvest, plentiful and golden, was the reward of his labours. He could not refrain from pouring out his soul in thanksgiving to Him, by Whose power and mercy this great work of spiritual regeneration had been accomplished. A nation had been brought out of bondage into the full light of the Gospel by the preaching of an Apostle, who had but a short time before set foot on the hospitable shores of Erin. Thus, in his "Confessions," does he give expression to the joy and gratitude to God that filled his heart: "Whence is it that, in Ireland, they who never had the knowledge of God, and hitherto only worshipped idols, have of late become the Lord's own people, and are called the Sons of God? The sons of the Scoti (the noble race), and the daughters of chieftains are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ. And there is one blessed Irish maiden, of the Scotish race, of noble birth, most fair, of adult age, whom I baptised; and soon thereafter she came to us on some business, and informed us that God's will had been revealed to her, admonishing her to become a Virgin of Christ and draw near to God. Thanks be to God, on the sixth day after that, she worthily and most eagerly embraced that state of life. And indeed all the Virgins of God act in like manner, not at the bidding of their parents - nay, they endure reproaches and persecutions from their parents - and, nevertheless, their number goes on increasing, so that I know not the number of the natives who thus have become of our kindred, besides the widows and those who observe continency."

At the head of this noble band of consecrated virgins, Saint Brigid, Patroness of Ireland, takes her rightful place. She, of all the spiritual children of Saint Patrick, was the brightest jewel in his apostolic crown. She is, and always will be, the pride and glory of the Irish Church, the most honoured and venerated on the bead-roll of her Saints, the joy and the crown of the womanhood of holy Ireland. Devotion to Saint

Brigid is not a matter of today or yesterday. It began during her earthly life, growing in intensity as the shadows closed in around her mortal career. The fame of her sanctity and her miraculous power rang during her days from end to end of her Island-home. After the National Apostle, she was proclaimed by all the greatest and best beloved of the Saints whose names enrich the Calendar of the Irish Church. Saint Brigid received from her people a worship which history accords to no other saint. The nation fell prostrate at her feet, offering to her the sweet incense of a tender and deep-seated love and devotion. The people beheld in her the noblest and best type of womanhood, raised to the most elevated plane attainable by the children of men this side of the grave. They recognised in her the realization of that blessing, which the Almighty had specially bestowed on their race, as a reward for the warm-hearted and generous welcome extended to the Apostle He had sent to teach them His heavenly doctrines. A people who had so readily opened their hearts to the teachings of their Apostle could not but rise to the highest pitch of enthusiastic devotion to her, who was the brightest and most exalted product of Saint Patrick's ministry. She typified the perfect woman, nurtured and fed on the word of God. She was the light that shone over their Island to direct the footsteps of the daughters of Erin in the paths of virtue and sanctity. In speaking of her they discarded the prefix Saint, and called her, in homely, yet reverent fashion, "Mo Brighe" - or "My Bride." The children received her blessed name at the baptismal font. The sturdy sons of the Irish race added her name to those usually adopted by their sex. With one chorus of acclamation she was proclaimed the Patroness of their land, the Protectress of their daughters' virtue, and the strength of their warrior sons in defence of Faith and Fatherland.

Such being the exalted and enviable hold on the hearts of her people obtained by Saint Brigid, by the heroism of her

virtues and the magnitude and fame of her miracles, it is not to be wondered at that the learned amongst them eagerly grasped their pens to record the minutest details of her saintly life. They could not possibly find language sufficiently expressive of the love they bore their Patroness. They were forced of necessity to seek an outlet for the expression of their admiration and love for her in words and phrases that to us of the present day may sound startling, and perhaps savour of exaggeration.

In one of the most ancient of her lives we find the following beautiful pen-portrait of the Saint artistically placed, as it were, in a jewelled frame. "Everything that Brigid sought of God was granted to her, for it was her desire to comfort the poor, to cancel distress, and to relieve every misery. No one was more retiring, more modest, more meek, more humble, or more chaste than Brigid. She was abstemious, prayerful, and patient. She was joyful in the Commandments of God. She was benevolent, forgiving, charitable; she was a Temple of God, a consecrated shrine for the Body and Blood of Christ; her heart and her mind were a resting throne for the Holy Ghost. She was afflicted with those that were in sorrow, she was bright in virtues and miracles. Her type in created things is the dove among the birds, the vine among the trees, the sun amidst the stars. She subdues pestilence, she restrains the fury of the tempest; she is the child of prophecy, the Queen of the South, the Mary of Erin." A nobler or more beautifully conceived panegyric than this has never been pronounced on any other saint whose name is inscribed on the Calendar of the Catholic Church. It truly expresses the love and gratitude that filled the Irish heart for their benefactress and Patroness. Little wonder is it that we find so many saintly and learned writers employing their graphic pens to record, in elegant verse, or flowing period, the heroic deeds, the numerous miracles, and the many virtues of their beloved Abbess of Kildare. Saint Ninnid, her

chaplain, faithfully placed on record the miracles he had witnessed during the time he had spent in her blessed and edifying company. Fiech, a disciple of Saint Patrick, wrote her life, while Saint Brigid was still performing her noble mission amongst the children of old Ireland. Saint Brendan, Bishop of Clonfert, wrote her life in verse. The poet-saints, Columba and Kilian of Inis-Keltra, sang her praises in sweetest poesy. These metrical lives of Saint Brigid were chanted by the cloistered children of the sanctuary. The multitude devoted themselves to the task of committing each verse to memory, so that they might share in the universal chorus of praise and thanksgiving which daily ascended to heaven from millions of Irish hearts. A modern writer of her life thus beautifully describes the use made of these metrical lives and hymns through the centuries down to our day: "Re-set, re-sung, transfused, translated, the melodious chime pealed down the ages like bells in a cathedral tower."

In what may be termed the golden age of the Catholic Church in Ireland, the first three centuries after Saint Brigid's death, the memory of Saint Brigid was kept alive by the writings of the saints and learned scribes who wrote the record of her holy life and noble deeds. Many manuscript copies of these lives are to be found in the celebrated libraries of the world. The missionaries, who preached the Gospel and evangelised many of the European countries, taught and spread devotion to Saint Brigid amongst the nations of which they were the Apostles. The monks of old took particular delight in transcribing and illuminating these ancient lives. By these means a knowledge of her exalted sanctity, her miraculous powers and spirit of prophecy was brought home to the inhabitants of the European continent. Hence, we find, in ages far remote from our own, devotion to Saint Brigid cultivated by Catholics of other lands, who had come to a knowledge of the true Faith by the labours and

exertions of the early Irish missionaries. One of the most precious and most valued possessions they took with them from the land of their birth and their love when they set out on their perilous mission of propagating the Faith amongst foreign nations, was a copy of the Life of Saint Brigid, under whose protection they placed themselves and their apostolic labours.

From the number of these ancient records preserved from the ravages of time and the destroying hand of the heretical bands, who would gladly have given them to the flames, it is not too much to say that an all-wise Providence exercised a special care and watch over them to save them from decay and destruction. It certainly appears providential that many of the earlier lives and copies of them, made by conscientious and faithful scribes, found their way to safe refuge in the archives of Catholic countries abroad. Had they been left at home, they would not have escaped the rigorous search made for such invaluable and priceless documents by Cromwell and his followers. There can be no doubt that they would have served to light the fires that consumed the bodies of our noble martyrs, put to death by the cruel and relentless enemies of their creed and race. The preservation of this store of inestimable value, which enshrines and catalogues the doings, the sayings, and the miracles of Saint Brigid, is the one consolation left us amidst the ruin and desolation caused by the burning and destruction of our ecclesiastical archives. This treasure is - and let us fervently thank God for it - the one great inheritance that the children of the early Church have left us to perpetuate and strengthen us today in our loyalty and devotion to Saint Brigid, the Patroness of our Land.

Besides these ancient and valuable lives written in either the Latin or Celtic tongue, we find lives of our Saint composed in the various languages spoken on the Continent

of Europe. Some of these date back to centuries, now long since lost in the vortex of time. Her Feast was solemnised and her divine Office chanted in many of the splendid cathedrals of European fame. This was particularly the case in those countries which had been converted by the teaching of an Irish missionary Saint. A learned French historian, Tillemont, treating of Saint Patrick's disciples, writes: "We commence with Saint Brigid, because, not only is there no Saint so much revered in Ireland, next after the Blessed Virgin herself, but she is also celebrated in the entire Latin Church, and even heretics themselves, notwithstanding all their false principles, cannot refrain from honouring her." The fame of her miraculous power, her wonderful spirit of prophecy, and the sublime sanctity of her own life, must have reached far and wide, and drawn all hearts to her in a sweet bond of loving affection and fervent devotion. When we have studied more closely her extraordinary life, and realized how near and dear the "Mary of Erin" must have been to Him Who raised her to the highest pinnacle of sanctity, we cease to wonder at Catholics of all nationalities fostering a devotion to a Saint whose days were spent within the narrow limits of an emerald Island set "in the ring of the Western Sea."

If we seek the key to the intense love and veneration for Saint Brigid that rules and sways the Celtic heart today, as in the centuries gone by, we must look for it in one of the noblest traits of the Irish character. No matter what our faults may be, we, the children of the Gael, can never be charged by our bitterest enemies with ingratitude to our friends and benefactors. Wherever, in our chequered history, a hand has been held out to bestow a favour upon our race, we treasure up the memory of the good deed and pour benedictions on the head of the giver. Saint Brigid, after our National Apostle, was the truest and best friend Ireland has ever had, or ever will have. During her long life she, like her

Divine Master, "went about doing good." She marked out the path of perfection which many an Irish virgin has since trodden, with happiest spiritual results. She infused a vigour and energy into the Irish Church, which it maintains down to the present day. Her works of charity relieved distress in many an Irish home. Her prayers strengthened and nurtured the infant Church, left by Saint Patrick, into a vigorous manhood. Her example stimulated the guardians of the sanctuary to renewed effort to evangelise those not reached by the Apostle, Saint Patrick, and to spread the Faith in lands beyond the seas. Her intercession has guided and preserved the Irish Church through many a storm of persecution and bloodshed, chronicled in the annals of our country. Her protecting hand is still extended over our Isle, that no spiritual harm may befall the Church which her blessed hands so laboriously toiled to extend and establish on a firm and lasting foundation. How, then, considering such a record of favours bestowed, could the children of this favoured land ever forget their benefactress and patroness - Saint Brigid? Should they, which God forbid, ever grow cold in their devotion to her, or become forgetful of her benefits to them, their crime would truly be an unpardonable one. A terrible change would come over the fair face of our country, every acre of which holds some sacred memorial of a life devoted to the spiritual regeneration of a people she loved next to Him, in Whose service her days were spent. The ivy-mantled walls of the temples erected by our forefathers in her honour would totter to the ground in indignant protest. The holy wells that bear her name would cease to give their blessed waters to an ungrateful nation. The fertile soil of the four provinces, consecrated by her missionary footsteps, would cease to yield their rich golden harvests. There is no indication of such untoward events happening in our generation. Saint Brigid still holds her high place in the hearts of Irish Catholics. Her consecrated virgins still assume her name when entering the cloister. Mothers are found to

give her name to their children at the baptismal font, and to place them under her protection. Churches are raised, year after year, in her honour. Fervent prayers ascend from Irish hearts, not only on her feast-day, but hourly, that God, through her intercession, may protect the Irish nation from the evils of the day, may bless and shield us from the enemies of our Faith, and send down on our Island the twin-gifts of righteous liberty and enduring peace.

It may be advisable, before coming to the events of our Saint's life, to say a word or two regarding those beautiful garlands of legendary and traditional lore woven round the stately and enduring monument of authentic facts, which the hands of reliable and saintly biographers have erected to her blessed memory. The author respectfully asks the reader to weigh well, and consider the following remarks of the late Canon O'Hanlon, P.P., contained in his *Life of St. Brigid*, a work manifesting deep learning and extensive research. The authority of such a world-famed student of Irish ecclesiastical lore must merit a reverent and respectful consideration from Irish Catholics. In a life of the Saint, such as this purports to be, many legends and traditions must be introduced to stimulate the devotion of the reader, and to relieve the monotony which would inevitably ensue from a mere studied recital of historical detail. Having read the extracts given at length, the reader will be the better enabled to judge between what he can reasonably believe as true, and what he may safely set down as mere pious tradition. Thus does the late Canon O'Hanlon write of the legends and traditions so thickly strewn through the authentic writings of learned and holy authors who have treated of the life and miracles of Saint Brigid: -

"The truly religious and disciplined spirit of an enlightened and a pious Christian will not too readily reject the various interesting legends contained in the acts of our National

Saints, when he is free to receive them on the weight, or set them in abeyance on the want of sustaining evidence. Many sceptical or over-fastidious critics undervalue the force of popular traditions, and regard such attested miracles as incredible or legendary; but while those persons desire to remove the cockle from the field of Irish hagiology, they possibly incur some risk, at the same time, of rooting up good seed with the tares."

In another place his remarks on the same subject are worthy of attentive consideration: "Religious feeling and Christian Faith do not require for their preservation and growth, the the production and publication of many legends to be found in special acts of our National Saints. Those narratives, however, were consonant with a prevalent taste and with the sentiments of our ancestors in past ages. Even yet, when received with due caution, and with a just, discriminating spirit, such legends may be found not altogether devoid of edification, granting their authenticity to be very questionable. A well-regulated mind will regard them chiefly as emanations of a former period, and as illustrations of popular opinion, national feeling, or religious impressions which widely prevailed during times when those narratives had been written."

If our readers keep before their minds the seasonable advice the above paragraphs contain, the study of Saint Brigid's life will undoubtedly prove to them a source of fascinating interest and lasting spiritual profit.

Her Birth and Infancy

Sweet heaven's smile
Gleamed o'er the Isle,
That gems the dreary sea,
One far gone day,
And flash'd its ray,
More than a thousand years away,
Pure Bridget, over thee.

- *Father Abram J Ryan*

There is a general agreement of opinion amongst Saint Brigid's most learned and reliable biographers that it was in the village of Faughart, County Louth, she first saw the light. The date of her birth is a matter upon which there exists great diversity of opinion amongst writers of her life. It may safely be placed in some year between 451 and 458.

Faughart is distant about three miles from Dundalk. In and around the village are to be found memorials of the Saint, which are religiously treasured by the inhabitants. The ruins of a church, said to have been built on the site of the very house in which Saint Brigid was born, are shown to the visitor. An old graveyard, in which are interred many noted men and women of bygone days, is still called Saint Brigid's Cemetery. The interested visitor will be shown Saint Brigid's Well, the waters of which are reputed to possess curative properties, as a result of the blessing bestowed upon them by the Saint, whose name they bear. The village itself is



surrounded by the fertile valleys of Louth. A splendid view of Dundalk Bay, with the Cooley mountains in the distance, is obtained from Faughart. The country around the birth-place of the Saint abounds in historic memories. Cardinal Moran, in his short *Life of Saint Brigid*, writing of Faughart, says: "Every inch of the adjoining plains is historic ground, and from the days of Dathi and Fingall, to those of Edward Bruce and O'Neill, and still later times, some of the most stirring scenes of Irish history were witnessed there." A stream runs through a field near the Holy Well. Pilgrimages are made by the people of the district, and from distant parts of the country to this stream, in the pious hope of being freed from their maladies, through the intercession of her who was born near its waters. Mention of Faughart is made by Saint Bernard in his life of Saint Malachy. He says that "three Bishops came into the village of Faughart, which they say was the birthplace of Saint Brigid."

The parents of Saint Brigid were Dubtach and Brotseach. The father was descended from a noble line of ancestors. He belonged to the race of Con of the Hundred Battles, one of the most famous warrior Kings of Ireland. He was a Druid of Leinster. Brotseach, like her husband, could lay claim to Royal descent. She was the daughter of Dalbronach, of the noble house of the O'Connors. It is not certain at what particular period the parents of our Saint received the grace of baptism. Some say that this sacrament was administered to them by the hands of Saint Patrick, while others assert that they were baptized by one of his immediate disciples. It is most probable that they received the grace of conversion before their saintly child was born.

To account for the fact that Saint Brigid was born in Louth, biographers are agreed that the mother of the Saint was on a visit to relatives in Faughart, when the illustrious event took place. This seems to be the true explanation of the fact

that the birth occurred outside the district in which the ancestral home was situated Leinster always has looked upon Saint Brigid as a child of the Lagenian race. The old chronicles make frequent mention of Leinster as the part of Ireland most blessed and favoured by the spiritual protection and benefactions of the Patroness of our country. In a very ancient poem she is addressed as the "Princess of the men of Leinster." Saint Columba, who sang her praise in verse, calls her "Dear Saint of Lagenia." Another Saint, Ultan of Ardbrechan, gives expression to his belief in her intercessory power in these words: "I shall be saved in all things by my Leinster Saint." It is certain that, soon after the birth of their child, Dubtach and Brotseach returned to their home on the fertile and expansive plains of Leinster.

From what history tells us of the ways of Divine Providence in granting heavenly manifestations at the birth of many of our more modern saints, we may justly assume that, in the case of Saint Brigid, signs and portents of her future sanctity were not wanting. She was predestined to reach the highest level of Christian perfection, as well as to guard and guide the infant footsteps of the Church founded by Saint Patrick. No more remarkable or momentous event could have taken place in the history of a nation than the birth of this first and most precious fruit of the labours and toils of our glorious Apostle. Her advent into this world was heralded, according to pious tradition, by many strange and wonderful happenings, which can be attributed only to supernatural agency. The good and saintly mother must have felt that hers was no ordinary child. Angels, they say, sang their hymns of praise and thanksgiving round her cradle. Perhaps it may have been the mother's privilege, too, to hear the sweet strains of celestial harmony that filled the house in which the child was born. Her eyes may have been permitted to gaze upon the dazzling brightness of the robes of the angelic minstrels, and to behold them place the

golden aureole round the head of her child as a token of her future greatness and sanctity. The beating of the infant's heart against her own must have indicated to her that the child of her womb was a "vessel of election," a specially-chosen spouse of the Most High, a temple and receptacle of the richest graces and blessings from "the Giver of all good gifts."

The happy parents of this wonderful child were meet guardians and protectors for such a precious charge. The ancient writings record that Dubtach, the father, "was renowned for his deeds of merit, no less than for his lineage; he was noble, humble, meek and replete with piety, and more noble still by his spouse and holy offspring." Several Saints of the Irish Church sprang from this pious and noble family. Saint Gall, Apostle of Switzerland; Saint Berchan, of Glasnevin, County Dublin; Saint Declan, of Ardmore, and many others, were relatives or descendants of Dubtach and his edifying spouse, Brotseach.



At the baptismal font the name Brigid, or Bride, was given to the infant. This name signifies "strength" or "virtue." It was peculiarly appropriate to one who was to become such a shining light in the firmament of the Irish Church. Traditions and legends of the most enchanting character are woven round the earliest days of the child's existence. It would be little short of sacrilege to cast them aside as myths or the products of Celtic fancy. When we consider the eminent sanctity to which Saint Brigid in after life attained, and the many and astounding miracles wrought by her blessed hands, we may well believe that heavenly manifestations of an extraordinary kind accompanied her advent into the world. These beautiful legends, at any rate, cannot fail to

elevate the mind and heart of the reader to a more sublime conception of the goodness and merciful ways of God, Who is "so wonderful in His Saints."

When the days of infancy had passed, and those of knowledge and wisdom succeeded, it became evident to her parents that the hand of God was forming and moulding the heart of Brigid to habits of the rarest virtue and piety. She was rapidly acquiring all those tender graces of heart and mind which adorn and beautify the souls of children, and make them the admiration and envy of their elders. The flowers of sanctity in the garden of her soul were beginning to bloom and multiply. Her modesty attracted the attention, not only of those of her household, but of all who came in contact with her. The people could not resist gazing in wonderment after her as she passed them by the wayside, and they silently praised God for having raised up in their midst this perfect model of unblemished innocence and virginal purity. The spirit of unceasing and constant prayer, so characteristic of her whole life, was manifest to all around her. She seemed as if truly her conversation was in heaven, and that she had established an uninterrupted communication between herself and her Divine Spouse in His Heavenly Kingdom. She stole away from the innocent companionship and amusements of her playmates to hide herself in some sequestered spot, where she could communicate with Him Whose love filled her heart to overflowing. It is related of her that having selected a quiet retreat, she wished to make with her own hands an altar before which she could daily offer to God the clean oblation of her young heart. Owing to lack of skill and materials, she failed to accomplish her pious design. An angel came to her rescue, and built the altar which she had been unable to complete.

To a truly Christian and pious nurse the education of the child-saint was entrusted. This good woman instructed her charge in the rudiments of knowledge. She also guided the foot-steps of Brigid in the ways of virtue and perfection. Her dual task she found to be a labour of love. The intellect of her pupil was keen to grasp the richest fruits from the tree of knowledge; and her heart was ever responsive to the sweet impulses and inspirations derived from increasing familiarity with God's merciful goodness and love towards mankind. Fortunate, indeed, was this teacher in having such a dutiful and obedient pupil. Many of her friends envied her in having the inestimable distinction of directing the course of the Saint's earliest and tenderest years. The heart of this wise and prudent guide must have often leaped for joy in beholding the child she loved so well, growing in natural grace and beauty, as well as readily assuming all the virtues and adornment that make the soul a veritable shrine of sanctity and perfection. That Saint Brigid was endowed with natural beauty of more than ordinary type is evident from the fact that she was looked upon by her kinsfolk as the most comely amongst the daughters of their race. An old tradition existed in the North of Ireland that Saint Brigid was the sister of the Blessed Virgin, who had come to earth again to instill purity and faith into the hearts of Irish maidens. This tradition, though of such an improbable and impossible character, serves to give us an estimate of the beauty of face and form of Saint Brigid, which caused her people to place her in such close connection with "the most beautiful among women."

A virtue that drew all hearts irresistibly to the "Mary of Erin" was her wonderful sympathy with, and charity Towards the poor and afflicted. She looked upon them as her dearest friends, and loved to have them around her. They came to her in their needs, and found her to be their best and most generous benefactress. In these sadly-conditioned and

pitiable objects of human suffering, she beheld Him Who had, of His own free will, selected poverty and suffering for His portion on earth. She well knew that in helping them in their dire necessities, and in relieving their distress, she was giving the greatest honour and glory to Him Who proclaims Himself the Father of the Poor. It must have been pleasing and profitable to behold this little child distributing her gifts to the poor. The air was filled with blessings and benedictions upon her head. The cry of distress was stifled; the impoverished and needy bodies were strengthened; the wan look of hunger was exchanged for that of radiant joy and delight, as the Saint poured her charity into the outstretched hands of the crowds that followed her. She erected a store-house into which she put everything in the shape of food and clothes she could collect. The meals, necessary for her own nourishment, oftentimes found their way into this hiding-place. It is related in the records of her life that her mother placed her in charge of the dairy and of the maids employed therein. To her surprise, our Saint found that on one occasion her excessive liberality had exceeded the bounds of prudence. The butter and milk had disappeared to the extent that barely sufficient remained for the family needs. Knowing that her mother would soon discover the deficiency in the department she had committed to her care, she sought aid from Heaven, whence she had so often experienced favours in time of need. Her prayer was heard. The place was filled by unseen hands with a lavish provision of milk and butter, so much so that her mother was astonished at the ample supply the dairy contained. She praised the maids for their industry and energy in the discharge of their duties. The maids well knew the source whence the abundance of milk and butter had come. They had seen their beloved child-mistress join her tiny hands in prayer. They watched, in silence and with awe, the appealing face of Brigid raised towards heaven in earnest supplication for help in this crucial moment, brought

about by her generosity to her friends, the poor. They joined their thanksgiving to those of the saintly child for the miracle that had been wrought by her supplication and prayers.

In a manuscript of very remote date is contained a copy of the prayer said to have been used on the occasion of the miracle just described. It is well worthy of reproduction as a beautiful form of supplication when favours are needed by those in want or distress: "O, my Sovereign Lord, Thou Who dost give increase in all things, bless, O God of unbounded greatness, this storehouse with Thy right hand. My storehouse shall be a storehouse of bright testimony; the storehouse which my King shall bless; a storehouse in which plenty shall abound. The Son of Mary, my beloved one, will bless my storehouse. His is the glory of the whole universe. May that glory be ever multiplied and be given unto Him."

On another occasion, when Dunlang, King of Leinster, spoke words of reproof to her for having given to a poor man the jewelled sword he had with his royal hand given to her father in token of friendship and esteem, she thus replied to the occupant of the throne: "Do not wonder, O King, that I have bestowed what was in my keeping on the poor, since, were it in my power to do so, I would give them all that is possessed by you, O King, and by my father; for God will give eternal rewards in exchange for such temporal riches." The King was impressed deeply by this response of the child to his words of sharp and heated reproof. He repented that, in a moment of anger, he had used them to one who had shown him a striking example of the exercise of Christian charity. To signify his approval of an act, the motive of which he now understood, he bestowed another sword of greater value, and a number of rich gifts, upon Dubtach, the father of her who had by her answer turned the King's rebuke into words of praise and admiration for her conduct.

The virtue of charity, which Saint Brigid thus early in life practised in the highest degree, increased with her years. All through her life we find this queen of virtues accompanying her wherever her footsteps were directed. In her own home, in her journeyings, she never ceased to distribute alms to the poor. Her example was infectious. She taught the princes and nobles to give of the riches they had received to those amongst their subjects upon whom the hand of want and hunger was heavily laid. In season and out of season she preached the doctrine of charity to the poor. Almsgiving was specially enjoined on those who followed her rule, or came under her influence. The spirit of charity, which she infused into the children of the infant Church of Saint Patrick, still happily survives. She planted this tree of Paradise in the soil of Ireland. That it has taken firm root in our land, the phenomenal and open-handed generosity of the Irish race, when the cry of suffering humanity reaches their ears, is ample proof.

This virtue of charity was not confined by Saint Brigid to man, the noblest work of God's creation. It was extended to the lower order of the animal world. Love of animals was a special characteristic of Saint Brigid. The birds of the air sang their sweetest matin songs round her dwelling, and were rewarded with food from her saintly hands. The lambs, typical of holy innocence and purity, accompanied the child in her walks and recreation. She fed them with her own hands and loved to store up food for them. Man's faithful friend and companion, the dog, had a special attraction for her. Many anecdotes are related to illustrate her kindness to these sagacious creatures. One alone will suffice for our purpose. A number of friends were invited to dinner. A very dainty and bounteous repast had been prepared for them. Saint Brigid was engaged in arranging the various dishes on the table when she heard the whining of a dog beside her; on looking down she saw the animal appealing to her with

longing eyes that betokened hunger, for something to satisfy his wants. The Saint took some of the richest foods on the table and gave them to the hungry beast. The guests were momentarily expected; there was not time to replace the food she had given to the dog. As a reward for her charity the viands removed from the table and given to the dog were miraculously replaced. This anecdote is found related in many of the ancient documents recording the daily life of Saint Brigid, from childhood to old age. We are not asked to accept these anecdotes as articles of faith. We are merely required not to summarily dismiss them as fables, or concoctions of vivid imagination, until we have thoroughly weighed the authority upon which they rest. Many of the most ancient of the Acts of Saint Brigid relate them in full detail, and therefore they merit some measure of credence from those who do not wish to rashly accuse the authors of inventing these stories to please the imaginations of their readers or to gratify their own extravagant conceptions of the greatness of their heroine.

The Apostle of Ireland, Saint Patrick, must have heard from many sources of the child of such deep piety and miraculous power, who was attracting the reverent attention of his flock in her home in Leinster. Saint Brigid was the fairest and most precious product of the Apostle's zeal in the conversion of Ireland. Her fame as a child, endowed with the rarest gifts of sanctity, was daily spreading through the length and breadth of the land. That the Apostle not only heard of Saint Brigid, but actually saw and conversed with her is a fact related in his "Tripartite Life." Saint Patrick, it says, was preaching for three days and three nights to an immense crowd that listened with breathless attention to his every word. Saint Brigid was brought by some friends to hear Saint Patrick speak of heavenly things. While the Apostle was discoursing, sweetly and eloquently, so that his words fell like softest and most ravishing music on the ears of his

listeners, Saint Brigid fell into a state of ecstasy. Saint Patrick commanded Saint Brigid to tell the assemblage what she had seen in her vision. "I saw," said the child, "a herd of white oxen among white crops; then I beheld spotted animals of different colours; and after these appeared black and darkly coloured cattle. Afterwards I saw sheep and swine, and lastly dogs and wolves worrying each other."

The Apostle interpreted this vision for his hearers: "The Church he had founded would enjoy peace for a time. Her brow would be adorned with snow-white flowers typical of the purity of her children and her peaceful progress through the three first centuries of her existence. The flowers would then be changed to a crown of thorns, which she would have to wear for many long and weary centuries to come."

Not only in her childhood, but also in the more mature years of her life and missionary labours, reliable authorities state, did Saint Brigid and Saint Patrick meet and seek counsel together for the expansion and development of the true faith amongst the Irish people.

The hour had arrived when her parents were called upon to decide the future of their beautiful and saintly daughter. Many suitors came to ask her hand in matrimony. To one and all she answered: "I am betrothed to Him Who has the angels for His servants." Her brothers endeavoured to force her into a matrimonial alliance with one or other of the many noble youths who came to see and woo her. But all to no purpose. The designs of God were to be fulfilled in her. A glorious mission was assigned to Saint Brigid by an all-wise Providence. The Holy Spirit was gently leading her away from the busy haunts of men, and the home of her parents. She was to become the head of the consecrated daughters of Erin, who by the lustre of their many virtues and the

heroism of their self-sacrifice, have always been the admiration of the nations and the glory of their race.

The Cloister

Maidens! henceforth the Virgin Mother spreads
Her shining Veil upon you.

- *Aubrey de Vere, Legends of Saint Patrick*

The rapidity with which the fire of Divine Faith swept along the valleys, and over the hills of Ireland, must have filled the heart of Saint Patrick with deep and fervent thanksgiving to God for having thus signally blessed the land of his apostolic labours. Eager and cheerfully did his hearers listen to his message of salvation, and beseech him to pour the sacramental waters on their willing heads. But what really brought tears of joy to the eyes of the Apostle was the alacrity with which so many women of all classes embraced the Evangelical Counsels by voluntarily giving up all they held dear to follow Christ in the paths of perfection. We have seen how Saint Patrick gave thanks to God for the thousands of young girls who, soon after their conversion, took a vow of virginity. The daughters of Kings and Princes, as well as those of the humbler classes, elected to become the spouses of Jesus Christ, rather than join themselves in matrimony with the best and noblest sons of their race. Two daughters of Milchu, the chieftain who had held Saint Patrick for many years in bondage, became consecrated virgins. Indeed, all over the Island, so great was the number of his flock who followed the example of these holy virgins, that the Apostle himself confesses that he could not count them. These good women lived with their families and devoted themselves to works of piety and charity amongst the people. The Apostle encouraged them to perseverance in their vow, by holding before them the special crown promised to those who deny themselves in this life. He had seen what a help was given to the Church in Rome by pious women, who though living in

the world were not of it. Freed as those Irish virgins were from the duties of matrimonial life, they were the better able to employ themselves in the many good works that came within their womanly sphere. The visiting of the sick, the relief of distress, the instructing of the young and ignorant, the example of their own virtuous lives, tended in no small measure, to lighten the burden that fell on the shoulders of the priesthood, and to attract converts to the new religion.

Saint Patrick, when the time was ripe for the carrying out of his design, was bent on forming these consecrated spiritual daughters into religious communities. He foresaw the amount of good work these virgins, thus banded together, could accomplish for the Irish Church. He was the first of the Apostles of the nations to formulate and carry into practical effect this scheme of religious organization, which has been the pride of Ireland from his day to ours. The Irish Sisterhoods have won for themselves a glorious and enviable name at home and abroad. They have raised to themselves a monument of enduring fame in the annals of the Catholic Church. What their zeal and self-sacrifice, in the various spheres of their sacred calling, have accomplished, and still accomplish, for the flock of Christ, cannot be measured by any human standard. This vast army of consecrated virgins of the Most High have many a victory to record on their banners. They have ennobled their sex by raising it to the highest level of excellence. They have made the name of Ireland a synonym for all that is purest and best in womanhood. They have centred upon our Island the admiration and esteem of the world as a nursery of virtue and purity for her daughters. They have earned the undying gratitude of the Irish race for the edifying example and noble self-sacrifice of their daily lives.

It was evident to those around her that Saint Brigid would soon join the ranks of those who had consecrated

themselves to God by religious vows. There was little, if any, surprise exhibited amongst her immediate friends when she took the first step towards accomplishing her holy resolve. She was about to leave parents, relatives and friends that she might the more freely devote herself to the service of God. Her father's house would no longer be blessed by her presence. The people would have no further opportunities of watching the graceful form of Saint Brigid passing to and fro amongst them on some mission of charity, or betaking herself to some secluded spot where, unseen and undisturbed, she could hold sweet converse with her heavenly spouse. The time had come when this sacrifice of parting from those she loved with all the ardour of unselfish affection, was demanded from her by a command from the King of Kings. The worldly-wise have never understood how such a sacrifice can, or why it should be made. How, they ask, can a young maiden, the joy and pride of loving hearts, and environed by everything that can tend to human happiness, exchange the bright sunshine of a terrestrial paradise for the penitential rigours and gloom of the cloister? It is vain to reason with those whom the world has blinded to the beauty and supreme happiness of the service of God. Their palate is vitiated by constant indulgence in the Dead Sea fruit of the world's so-called pleasures. They cannot, therefore, taste the ineffable sweetness of the heavenly food which a Divine hand daily administers to those chosen ones, whom He has selected to dwell in His blessed sanctuaries upon earth. His love is ample reward for what they voluntarily leave behind in a world that cannot, with all its tinselled attractions, satisfy a tenth of the heart-cravings of its dupes and votaries.

When the parents of Saint Brigid heard that she was determined to embrace the religious life, they endeavoured by every means at their disposal to dissuade her from taking such a step. They were naturally anxious to keep her near

them, so that she might be to them as their days lengthened, their solace and comfort. Their tears were of no avail. Their daughter had received a call from heaven to the higher and more perfect life, and she must trample on all human considerations and obey the summons. We must not censure the parents too harshly for endeavouring to place obstacles in the path of their saintly offspring. They loved her with an intensity of parental affection, not only because she was "flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone," but also because of her sweetness of disposition, and the many virtues with which her pure soul was adorned. It was a great sacrifice to be deprived of the company of a child who was the light and sunshine of their home. They were converts to the Faith, and could not possibly understand the immense benefits, spiritual and temporal, the entrance of their daughter into the cloister would inevitably bring upon them in the years to come. Were she to remain at home, as other virgins were accustomed to do, performing the domestic duties of the house and fulfilling the obligations their social position demanded, they would possibly have allowed her to bind herself to God by religious vows. Brigid was not content to remain under her parent's roof-tree. She must have received, during her frequent communications with Heaven, some intimation of the great work she was to accomplish for the Church by the establishment of many religious communities. Perhaps, in those frequent visions which she was privileged to enjoy, she saw herself installed as foundress of the first Irish Sisterhood, the parent branch of so many institutions of holy women consecrated to the service of God.

Seven other pious virgins accompanied Saint Brigid to found her first religious community established in Ireland. They quietly and silently took their departure from their several homes to take their vows at the feet of one of God's ministers appointed to receive them. It was the custom in

those days that only a bishop could receive the vows of those wishing to consecrate their lives to God in the religious state. These holy virgins journeyed on until they reached the residence of a bishop, who had power to complete the wish of their hearts and the firm resolve of their lives. There can be little doubt that their destination was that part of the County Meath in which the celebrated Hill of Croghan is situated. Saint Maccaille was bishop of this part of Ireland. When these spouses of Christ appeared before him, he advised them to wait awhile before taking their vows until he had made enquiries as to their antecedents, and the motives which inspired them in their choice of life. They were strangers to him, and he thought it prudent to ascertain whether or not they were actuated by some sudden caprice or misdirected zeal. The pastors of the early Irish Church had to exercise more than ordinary prudence to keep within proper limits the first fervour and religious enthusiasm of their converts. This initial check to their ardour, the good Bishop thought, would have the effect of causing these young and beautiful maidens to seriously consider the magnitude and irrevocable nature of the step they were intent on taking before it was too late to retrace it. He received substantial and convincing evidence that the hand of God was guiding these postulants, who had made a long journey, to receive his episcopal sanction for the solemn act they wished to perform. In the presence of a large congregation, a sign of approval was given when Saint Brigid and her companions entered the church to pray. The people saw with astonished eyes a column of fire upon the head of the Saint. It reached to the roof of the Church. This miraculous event was related at once to the Bishop. He then knew that there could be no obstacle to the reception of the eight pious virgins into the ranks of the consecrated daughters of the Church. He performed the ceremony of reception in presence of many of those who had been eye-witnesses of the miracle that had taken place a short time

before. The Bishop was now convinced that he had before him no ordinary aspirants to the more perfect and exalted state of religious observance. It was with trembling hands he placed the veil on the head of her whom he had reason to know was the maiden whose fame for sanctity and miracles had reached the territory over which he had spiritual charge.

Saint Aengus, in his Kalendar, speaks of this saintly Bishop Maccaille as:

"A rod of gold, a vast stem,
Great Bishop Maccaille."

He states positively that "it was he who placed the veil on Brigid's head." His principal church was at Croghan Hill, in Westmeath. It was here, according to the most reliable authorities, that Saint Brigid laid the foundation of the first Community of Nuns in Ireland. This was to be a place of novitiate, under the guidance of Saint Maccaille, until they had prepared themselves for their final and more solemn vows. Many other holy women sought for admission amongst them. Noble and highly-educated ladies came gladly to seek entrance into this home of sanctity. The number of postulants increasing, Saint Brigid was obliged to enlarge the structure she had erected to afford them shelter. The Convent was built of wood, obtained in a neighbouring forest. The task of finding accommodation for those wishing to enter the religious life was not difficult or expensive. The good people around them were only too willing to give them help and assistance, when required. They supplied them with food, tilled the ground for them, and did all the menial services required to maintain this community free from all temporal anxieties, that the Sisters might devote their days to prayer, meditation, and good works.

The time of probation had now drawn to a close. Saint Maccaille was perfectly satisfied that no human consideration had urged these good women to seek refuge in the cloister as a means of escaping from a world that had lost its glamour and enchantment for them. They sought silence and retirement that they might the more perfectly serve God, save their souls, and procure, by their prayers and charitable offices, the salvation of the race of which they were exemplary daughters. Their spiritual guide and father, Saint Maccaille, brought Saint Brigid and her seven companions to Saint Mel, Bishop of Ardagh. This holy prelate received the Saint and her little community with a warmth and hospitality worthy of his great Irish heart. He saw what a wonderful future was in store for his beloved country, when religious communities were fully established in every important centre of the four provinces. This small band of earnest and holy virgins was to be as the grain of mustard seed, springing up in due season into a mighty tree, the branches of which would extend over all Ireland. He felt not a little comforted to think that in his particular pastoral charge the good seed was to be planted. Saint Mel was a nephew of Saint Patrick, and it may be presumed that Saint Maccaille wished to pay this relation of the National Apostle the high honour of receiving the final vows of the Patroness of Ireland. Reliable authorities incline to the belief that it was the hand of Saint Mel that placed the white veil on the head of Saint Brigid and her seven sisters in religion. A white habit and veil were the distinctive dress of Irish nuns for many centuries. Saint Brigid and her companions were to take up their noble mission in the Church; to go into the world, where sin and sorrow dwelt, and to win souls to Christ by the example of their mortified and holy lives. Saint Mel requested Saint Brigid to erect a Convent in Ardagh, so that he could have the advantage of the missionary labours of herself and companions. He gave her a tract of land not far from his own church upon which to build her Convent. The

Saint complied with the request of the holy Bishop. In a short space of time the work was brought to completion. Many willing hands set to work to prepare the home for these Spouses of Christ. Generous donations poured in upon them to help in the good work. Nothing was left undone, on the part of the people, to show their appreciation of the benefit bestowed on them by the establishment of this Convent of Nuns in Ardagh. It was the first Conventual House of strict religious observance planted on Irish soil. Saint Maccaille had formed a religious community, as we have seen, in his own territory of Westmeath. It was only a place of novitiate or probation. Saint Brigid and her companions lived there in preparation for the solemn act of perpetual consecration to the service of God which took place in Ardagh, in the presence of Bishop Saint Mel. Thus we may, with truth, say that at Ardagh was established the first religious community of consecrated virgins in Ireland

It is related in the ancient records that Saint Maccaille invited Saint Brigid and her companions to partake of his hospitality. Before tasting the dishes she had set before him, she asked him as a special favour to discourse to them on heavenly things. He selected the Eight Beatitudes as his subject. When he had finished, he requested her to select one or other of the Beatitudes which she thought might be most suitable for the members of the Community to cultivate and make the basis of their life-work. Saint Brigid turned to her companions and said: "My dearly beloved Sisters in Christ, we are in number eight virgins, and eight virtues are proposed to us for your observance and sanctification. Although whoever has one virtue in a perfect degree must necessarily possess many other religious excellencies, as every single virtue is bound up and connected with one of a different kind; however, let each one of you select whatever particular Beatitude you may desire for your special devotion." The Sisters were greatly

pleased with this injunction, and they asked their Superioress to make her choice first as she held the highest position amongst them. Saint Brigid without hesitation selected the Beatitude of Mercy. This virtue, so dear to God and beneficial to His creatures, has been the distinguishing characteristic of the Irish Sisterhoods in all times and places. The clothing of the naked, the feeding of the hungry, the instruction of the ignorant and unlettered, have always been the chief aims and objects of the heroic lives of the Irish Sisters of all Orders.

The Convent of Saint Brigid became the centre of great activity in the very first term of its foundation. Thousands flocked there to gain instruction in secular and religious knowledge. Prince and peasant, in search of rest and refreshment, after long and tedious journeys, were received with true Irish hospitality. Ladies of highest rank sought this home of peace and quiet, to devote a few days or weeks to prayer and contemplation, free from the disturbance and interruption of worldly cares and duties. The missionaries, as they gathered the candidates for baptism, sent them to Saint Brigid and her companions for instruction, in preparation for baptism and the reception of the other sacraments. The poor came for daily food and alms, and were never turned away hungry or empty-handed from the Convent door. Nothing could equal the zeal of the Sisterhood for gaining souls to Christ, by dispensing bounteous charity to all in need of help and assistance, spiritual or temporal. Saint Brigid liberally gave away the gifts she received in large quantities from her benefactors. She had no care or anxiety for the wants of tomorrow. These presents and donations were quickly transferred to the outstretched and appealing hands of the poor and afflicted. It is said that, on one occasion, having nothing less costly to give in charity, she gave a most precious ornament, the gift of a royal hand, to some poor beggarman.

Saint Mel "of the honeyed tongue" had great confidence in the efficacy of Brigid's prayers. He had appointed her Abbess and ruler of the nuns forming the first Irish Community. Whenever he desired to obtain some special favour from God, or found himself in some difficult position, from which he sought release, he had recourse to Saint Brigid and her sisters in religion. He had good reason to feel confidence in their intercessory power, because no request he had ever asked them to pray for was refused. The King of Teffia, the territory in which Ardagh is situated, gave a great banquet to his chieftains. Saint Mel was an honoured guest of the King on the occasion. The King commanded one of his servants to lay upon the table a vase of most exquisite workmanship and priceless ornamentation. The poor servant accidentally allowed the vase to fall from his hands. It broke into a thousand fragments on the ground. The King, in a wild state of rage, ordered the servant to be immediately put to death. Saint Mel interceded for the servant and asked to have the death sentence postponed for a little time. He told the other servants to gather all the fragments they could and carry them to the Convent of Saint Brigid near at hand. He went in haste to inform Saint Brigid and ask her prayers for the servant's life. The vase was restored to its original state, and was carried by the hands of Saint Mel back to the banquet table. When the King and his chieftains saw the precious vessel, they pronounced it even more beautiful than before. Saint Mel related, for the edification of those who had embraced the Catholic Faith, and as a convincing proof of its Divine origin for those still adhering to Druidical worship, that God had wrought this miracle in response to the prayers of Saint Brigid.

Our Saint was specially requested by Saint Mel to accompany him to a Convention of the Clergy that was held at Telltown on the banks of the Blackwater, in the County Meath. It is positively stated by ancient writers that Saint

Patrick presided at this assembly. It was a meeting, the result of which was fraught with very grave consequences to the Irish Church. The Druids and their followers were ever on the watch to find some reason to restrain their people from embracing the Faith taught by Saint Patrick. If they could in any way find a flaw in the moral character of any of his disciples, they knew they would be furnished with a powerful weapon against the religion into which thousands of their former adherents were daily being received. An opportunity for attack on the teachers of the principles and practices of the Catholic Faith was soon to be afforded them. An impious and degraded woman openly accused Bishop Bron, a disciple of Saint Patrick, and a man of great learning and piety, of a crime highly damaging to his moral character. She was induced to bring this abominable and baseless charge at the instigation of a Pagan chieftain. He promised her a rich reward should she succeed in wounding the good name of this servant of God, and bringing his religion into disrepute among his converts. But the attack proved abortive. Saint Brigid, it is said, at the command of Saint Patrick, performed a miracle which completely established the innocence of the holy Bishop, and utterly confounded his accusers. This miracle had the effect of causing a great number of pagans to forswear allegiance to their false gods, and to cast themselves humbly at the feet of Saint Patrick and his disciples, praying to be admitted into the one true fold of the Catholic Church.

Saint Brigid remained about twelve years at Ardagh. The fame of her sanctity and miraculous gifts was spreading from one part of Ireland to another. Chieftains and princes came from afar to seek her counsel in ruling their subjects, or in settling disputes between themselves and neighbouring rulers. Priests sought her advice in matters of supreme spiritual moment to themselves or their flocks. Even those who still worshipped their false gods came from

mere curiosity to see this famous virgin, of whom they had heard such wonderful things. It is certain that very few, if any, of these pagans returned to their homes without having gained, by the instructions and prayers of Saint Brigid, the grace of conversion. To the little children, who loved to play around the Convent grounds, she was the kindest of mothers. Many are the anecdotes related of her kindness and love for children.

As the Sisterhood increased, Saint Brigid besought the Bishop to have a priest appointed to attend to the spiritual wants of herself and community. It is said that Saint Patrick himself assigned to this duty a holy priest named Natfroich. He was also to act as her guide and companion when she left the Convent on some errand of charity, or in response to a call of a Bishop, who sought her help and counsel in affairs concerning his Church and flock.

Her work for souls in Ardagh was so highly appreciated by the inhabitants that they could not think of allowing her to depart from them. However, other portions of the Vineyard of the Lord had to be tilled and planted by her blessed hand. From all parts of Ireland, bishops and priests were loudly calling on her to visit them and establish convents. She must leave Ardagh and complete the work assigned to her by an all-wise Providence, viz., to become "the chaste head of the Nuns of Erin."

Her Missionary Journeys

And they wear holy Veils on their faces,
Their footsteps can scarcely be heard.
They pass through the Valley like Virgins
Too pure for the touch of a word!

- *Father Abram J. Ryan, The Song of the Mystic*

The community at Ardagh, of which Saint Brigid was Foundress and Abbess, increased daily in numbers. The blessing of Heaven was upon this home of learning and sanctity. The austerity of their lives and the practice of the several virtues that make mortals "little less than the angels" had a special attraction for the pious daughters of Erin. Ladies of noble birth left their luxurious homes, and gladly fled to the sheltering walls of the Ardagh Convent. They willingly exchanged the costly robes of the rich for the snow-white, simple dress of an Irish nun. They brought their wealth, which the liberal Brehon laws allowed them to retain for their use and benefit, to be expended by the generous hand of Saint Brigid for the relief of suffering humanity. Women well versed in all branches of learning enrolled themselves amongst the spiritual children of the holy Abbess, to devote their talents to the instruction of the youth of their native land. Bishops and priests heard of, with infinite pleasure, the measure of success which blessed the first foundation of a Religious Sisterhood on the congenial soil of Ireland. Saint Mel, who gave every help and encouragement to the Sisters in their various works of charity, raised his hands to heaven in thanksgiving for the favour bestowed on Ardagh, his Episcopal See.

The Convent of Saint Brigid soon became famous as a centre of religious fervour and zeal for the glory of God and the

salvation of souls. Thousands of men and women of all classes flocked thither to receive instruction in the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Faith. The Sisters undertook the task of preparing these converts for baptism. Many of the bishops and clergy came from long distances to take counsel with Saint Brigid in matters of great concern for the welfare of the Church. The Convent of Ardagh was noted for the generosity of its hospitality to wayfarers and strangers. Princes and their retainers, bent on peaceful or warlike expeditions, were entertained and refreshed after long and fatiguing journeys, when they sought food and drink at the Convent doors. Many miracles are related in the ancient lives of the Saint as having been performed to supply the many demands made on the resources of the Conventual Store. The poor knew well that a welcome awaited them when they sought alms from the Sisterhood. No matter how small the stock of provisions or how impoverished the funds at the disposal of the nuns might be, the poor were never turned away hungry or empty-handed. Imperative orders were given by the Saint, who had selected Mercy as her favourite virtue, that, whoever else might suffer, the poor should have first claim on the generosity of the Community. Those who still followed the pagan rites and customs of their forefathers were influenced by this practical lesson of the law of love and charity, to abandon their former errors and superstitions for the true religion. Young women, pursued by wicked men, who sought to force them into a distasteful and unholy alliance, found a refuge and sanctuary within the Convent enclosure. Truly, the angel of peace and love dwelt within the walls of this blessed retreat. The saintly Abbess had sent, at the request of numerous bishops and priests, white-robed bands of her followers to all parts of Ireland, where their inestimable services were most required. Communities of those early Brigidines were now labouring in the fruitful vineyard of the Irish Church, in the most remote parts of the country. Saint Patrick must have rejoiced at

beholding the golden harvest these earnest and zealous reapers were storing in the apostolic granaries. Daily the number of converts increased, as the sphere of their labours extended. Kings and queens, princes and chieftains, were admitted to the true fold. Before the Apostle of the Nation was called to his reward, it was his privilege to behold, with joyous and thankful heart, the destruction of Paganism and the firm and universal establishment of the Christian Faith upon its ruins. It has been well said that "Saint Patrick sowed, the other (Saint Brigid) came when the harvest was ripe; the one watered with tears, the other gathered with joy; the one passed on to enjoy his reward, when the other culled the most blooming flowers to decorate his festive offering on the day of his departure."

Saint Brigid now felt that she might safely leave in the hands of another the management of the Ardagh foundation. By her example and devotion to its interests, she had nursed it into vigorous life and abiding strength. Voices were calling, and hands extended to her, from many parts of Ireland, to come and sanctify by her presence and edify by her example, the less favoured portions of the Island, which knew her only by name and by the fame of her miraculous powers. Accompanied by a select band of Sisters, and her spiritual guide, Natfroich, she set out on a journey, which covered the greater portion of Ireland. Saint Mel, her friend and benefactor, asked her first to visit a holy virgin, named Briga, or Brigh, who had long prayed for this favour. Whilst enjoying the companionship and hospitality of her pious hostess, a woman came with a present of apples to Saint Brigid. No sooner had this present been made to the Saint than two poor lepers came to her for alms. The woman was commanded to divide the fruit with them. She replied: "I brought these apples, not for lepers, but for yourself and your nuns." The Saint rebuked her for her want of charity, and told her that her trees would never again bear fruit. This

woman, so wanting in Christian charity, on her return home found her fruit trees stripped of their ripe and luxuriant crop. They remained barren from that day forward, yielding no golden fruit to reward the labour of their owner. This anecdote is found in the lessons of her Office, contained in the Breviary of Aberdeen.

At another time, Saint Brigid was making a journey through the plain of Teffia, or Theba, in Longford, when she met a family driving a herd of cattle before them. The man and his household carried heavy burdens upon their shoulders. The poor beasts were in want of water, and their drivers were faint and weary, vainly searching to supply their stock with a refreshing draught to keep life in them. The excessive summer heat dried up all the available springs. Saint Brigid, seeing the piteous plight of this family, unyoked the horses from her own chariot and gave them to the poor man, to help him on his way. She told the nuns with her to dig down under the ground. She said to them: "Dig beneath the sod which is near, that a well of water may be produced, for some persons shall come hither, who, although having food, shall require drink." A fountain of purest water sprang from the ground in response to the prayers of the Saint. A chieftain, surrounded by an imposing retinue on horse and foot, came on the scene of this miracle, and was astonished to find such a copious supply of refreshing waters on this sun-baked plain. When he and his companions had availed themselves of this welcome discovery, they prepared to depart. The chieftain noticed that the chariot of the Saint had no horses attached to it. Having learnt the cause, he supplied herself and companions with two fiery steeds that had never been trained to harness. When they were, after considerable difficulty, yoked to the chariot, they became, to the astonishment of all, most docile and obedient to the hand of the driver. These miraculous events are not the fanciful outcome of some over-heated imagination, but are

recorded in that valuable and trustworthy document, the Sixth Life of Saint Brigid, written in a period not very distant from the date of their occurrence.

We now pass to a very important and interesting point in the missionary journeyings of Ireland's Patroness. The Bishops Mel and Melchu came to Saint Brigid inviting her to proceed with them to visit Saint Patrick, then preaching in East Meath. She replied that she would gladly comply with their request, as she was anxious to obtain the blessing of the Apostle. On their journey, a certain man, with cattle and two wagons, asked leave to accompany them, so that he might minister to their wants. The Bishops offered objection, lest they might be delayed on the road by the number of beasts and amount of baggage these people had in their possession. Saint Brigid said to the Bishops: "Proceed ye before us, I shall remain and assist them." When the Bishops had gone, she enquired the cause of delay in placing the baggage in the wagons. They told her that a paralytic man and blind woman were already in occupation of them. Blessing some water, the Saint poured it on the stricken limbs of the man and restored them to their former vigour. In like manner, she restored sight to the blind woman. In due time the travellers reached the plain where Saint Patrick was preaching the word of God. A Council of Bishops and Clergy was being held when they arrived. As soon as the assembled clerics saw Saint Brigid approaching, they rose and welcomed her with becoming ceremony. It was at this Council of Telltown, in the barony of Upper Kells, County Meath, that she vindicated the character of Bishop Bron, which, as we have previously seen, was assailed in such vile fashion by a profligate woman. During her stay there, she wrought many miracles for the relief of sufferers, both Pagan and Christian. A great concourse of people must have foregathered on this plain. The annual "Oenach" or Fair was being held. Saint Patrick must have seized the opportunity,

afforded by this event, of addressing an immense crowd of people whom he might not otherwise be able to reach in his missionary travels. The fair was one of the largest and most popular in Ireland. National games were taken part in by athletes from all parts of the country. Each division of Ireland supplied its contingent of champions and their followers. The miracles that Saint Brigid wrought before the eyes of this multitude brought many converts to the Catholic Church. The impressive majesty of Saint Patrick's oratory, and the extraordinary cures effected amongst the people by the prayers of Saint Brigid, could not but have the effect of opening the minds and hearts of unbelievers to the divine origin and truth of the Catholic Faith. Having received the blessing of Saint Patrick upon herself and companions, Saint Brigid returned to her Convent, scattering, as she went her way, innumerable blessings on the sick and afflicted, who anxiously waited for her coming and placed their trust in her miraculous power.

Contained in the Acts of her life, we find a detailed account of a visit paid by our Saint to a holy virgin named Saint Laisre at her cell or Convent. It would seem, from the fact that the holy Abbess was invited there in a special manner, that the Convent was not one of her many foundations. Saint Laisre was of noble birth, and had gathered round her a few ladies of similar lineage, who had bound themselves by vow to the service of God and the poor. A little oratory or church was attached to the Convent. During the visit of Saint Brigid, the Apostle of Ireland, accompanied by a large number of the faithful, sought hospitality at the Convent. The nuns of Saint Laisre's Church found themselves unable to supply the wants of such a large number of people. They had recourse to Saint Brigid to help them out of this difficult and trying situation. Their saintly guest enquired what provisions had they in their possession. They replied that twelve loaves, an egg, and a little milk, were all they could

find in their store. Saint Brigid said, to their astonishment, that these were amply sufficient for all who had gathered there on that memorable day. The Saint commanded the Scriptures to be read by one of the nuns of Saint Laisre's community. The food and drink were miraculously multiplied, so that, after having satisfied the wants of this great gathering, there remained sufficient to replenish the Convent store-room. Saint Laisre, as a thanksgiving offering for the favour Heaven, through Brigid's intercession, had granted to her and her community, offered her Convent and Church to God and Brigid for ever.

A bond of holy friendship existed between Saint Brigid and Saint Ere, or Eric, of Slane, on the banks of the Boyne. It appears from her Acts that she paid him a visit, and accompanied him on a tour to his native province of Munster. Saint Ere, or Ercus, was a man of profound learning and sanctity, a bishop, and one of the earliest disciples of Saint Patrick. The "Pearl of Ireland," as our Saint is beautifully called, was desirous of visiting certain consecrated places and holy persons in Munster. She availed herself of this opportunity, afforded by Saint Ere, who was about to visit his relatives, who were great nobles and princes in Munster. One day, while on their journey, Saint Brigid said to the Bishop: "O, venerable father, point out to me the quarter of Munster in which your family resides." The Bishop pointed out their territory to his questioner. u At present," said Saint Brigid, "a war is there waging between your tribe and another clan." The Bishop exclaimed: "O holy Mother! I believe what thou hast told me is true, for when I last left them to see you they were in a state of discord." "O Father," said Saint Brigid, "your people are now routed." One of Saint Eric's disciples asked Brigid the question: "How are you able to see the fight at such a distance?" The Bishop gravely rebuked this cleric for daring to question the unmistakable gift of vision with which the Holy Spirit had

illuminated the mind of the Virgin, whose blessed companionship they were privileged to enjoy. Saint Eric then cried out: "O, Servant of God, sign our eyes that we may witness those things thou seest." Then the disciple, whom the Bishop had checked for his incredulity, with agonised voice and terror-stricken countenance, cried out: "Alas, also, my Lord, at this moment my eyes behold the decapitation of two brothers." Subsequent enquiries but too sadly confirmed the accuracy of the events, which the Spouse of Christ had so minutely detailed to her horrified and interested listeners.

Another anecdote in connexion with this visit of our Saint to the province of Munster will, we hope, prove edifying and interesting to our readers. Saint Brigid was resting from her labours beside the sea-shore, not far from the house in which the good Bishop, Saint Eric, dwelt. The place has been identified by the learned historian, Dr. Lanigan, as Kilbride, near Tramore, in the County Waterford. Near this beautiful spot an Anchorite dwelt, who, by the austerity and singular purity of his life, had gathered round him a number of disciples. The news had reached them that Saint Brigid and her nuns, of whom they had heard so much, had taken up their abode not many miles away. The disciples approached their Spiritual Father and said to him: "O Father, let us visit Holy Brigid, that she may bless us." To which request the Anchorite replied: "My children, you know already my vow to visit no woman." This holy man and his disciples were on their way to form a hermitage on some lonely island off the Irish coast. They were in close proximity to a cell, in which Saint Brigid was praying, when the request of the disciples was made.

When they arrived at a hospice in which they were to pass the night, they discovered that the greater portion of their luggage had been left behind on the road. They at once attributed their loss to their neglect in not having sought

the blessing of Saint Brigid when passing her cell. In atonement for their fault they spent the night in fasting and prayer.

Saint Brigid called her nuns round her and bade them carry into the Convent the property which these holy men had left on the wayside. The monks, with their leader, the Anchorite, returned for their belongings. They humbly knelt for Saint Brigid's blessing. They remained three days and as many nights near where she lived. They united their voices to those of the nuns in praise and thanksgiving to God for all His mercies, and for this particular favour granted to them, to exalt and glorify the name of His servant, Brigid. At the earnest request of the Anchorite and his brethren, our Saint accompanied them for one day, on their return journey, discoursing to them sweetly on heavenly things, and imparting a special blessing to them on her leave-taking.

We next discover Saint Brigid carrying out her mission of charity in the County of Limerick. A very touching and beautiful anecdote is related in the Third and Fourth Life of the Saint, as having occurred in the plain of Cliach. This district lies round Cnoc-Aine, or Knockaney, and comprises part of the Barony of Conagh, in that County. The holy Abbess and her companions went to the house of a certain chieftain to obtain liberty for a captive held in bondage there. The chieftain was not at home. The chiefs foster-father and his children were in the house. The traditional love for music which, according to a celebrated French writer, was characteristic of all the children of Erin, austere hermits, venerated bishops, grave abbots, contemplative virgins though they might be, manifested itself on this occasion. A number of harps were idly hanging on the ancestral walls. The Saint asked the young people to play for them, to while away pleasantly the time of waiting for the chieftain's return. They said they were not able to oblige her as the

harpers were away from home. Some of the Saint's companions told them to take down the harps and Brigid would bless their hands, and enable them to wake sweetest music from the instruments. The foster-father addressed these words to the Saint: "May God's Saint bestow her blessing to enable us to harp for her." The blessing was gladly given, and they, to their astonishment and the delight of their hearers, played with all the skill of trained harpers.

The chieftain, approaching his house, heard the sweet strains of music that floated from its windows. Having enquired the cause, he asked a blessing on himself and his house from the Saint. It was given on condition that the captive should be immediately set free, and Saint Brigid and her companions went their way rejoicing. The foster-father of the chief and his sons followed the profession of harpers to the day of their death. Their posterity rose to the dignity of chief bards of the monarchs of Ireland.

The province of Connaught was also blessed by the footsteps of Saint Brigid during her missionary travels. The many places in Connaught which bear her name still keep green the memory of the works of mercy and compassion she performed there for the poor and afflicted. She dwelt for a time in an extensive plain called Hai, in the County of Roscommon. She established there several cells, or Convents. The number of her spiritual children had increased so rapidly, by the addition of postulants from all parts of the kingdom, that she had no difficulty in sending communities to the bishops and priests of the four provinces who applied for them. Until such time as a Convent could be built for their use, they remained under the roof of some hospitable, generous patron. The ancient lives of the Saint record many miracles performed by her in Connaught to strengthen the faith of the new converts, and to attract the

followers of the Druidical worship to the Christian belief. Before large gatherings, made up of Catholics and Pagans, these wonders were wrought, so that all might see the miraculous gift bestowed upon her for the benefit of the suffering members of her race, the edification of the faithful, and the conversion of the unbelieving.

In her return journey to her native Leinster, we are told in her Fourth Life, Saint Brigid arrived at Ath-Luain, the historic town of Athlone, situated on the banks of the lordly Shannon. Near this town there is a celebrated well called Tobar-Brighde, or Bridewell, to which pilgrimages were frequently made in former days. Numerous are the miracles recorded as having taken place there through the intercession of the Saint. The fame of this well had reached far and near, so much so that even the Pagans brought their sick there that they might receive a share of the favours so liberally bestowed on their Christian kinsfolk. It was in Athlone that the miracle related in many of her ancient lives took place, in presence of a large gathering of people. The boatmen refused to row herself and her companions across the Shannori to the Meath side, on their homeward journey to her native province, without payment of an exorbitant fee. They told the ferrymen that they would walk across rather than pay such an impossible sum. The boatmen and many of the crowd laughed at this threat. One of the nuns turned to Saint Brigid and asked her to bless the swollen waters of the river that they might so decrease as to permit them to ford it and dispense with the services of the boatmen. To the astonishment of these assembled to witness the departure of the Saint and her religious, the angry waters subsided to such an extent that it reached scarcely to the knees of Saint Brigid and the nuns. Amid the prayers and benedictions of the crowds on the river's banks, they bade farewell to Connaught, where a hearty Irish welcome had been everywhere extended to them.

Ulster was not forgotten in the journeyings of Saint Brigid through her beloved country, to establish her religious houses, and propagate the Christian Faith by her teaching and miracles. We find in her Acts that she accompanied Saint Patrick to the County Tyrone. The Apostle was preaching to an immense gathering of people in Findermore, in the townland of Clogher. It is said that he discoursed to the people for three days and nights continuously, without feeling fatigue or wearying his hearers, so eager were they to hear the word of God. Saint Brigid appeared to the Apostolic preacher to have fallen asleep during his discourse. Saint Patrick was surprised that such a holy virgin should thus give way to the weakness of nature while the sacred word of God was being announced. The Apostle reproved her when she had risen from her slumber. Saint Brigid immediately fell on her knees and humbly begged pardon of the Apostle in these words: "O Father, forgive me; O most pious Lord, spare me, for during this hour I have had a vision." Saint Patrick told her to describe what the vision had revealed to her. The holy Abbess then announced to the people assembled what Heaven had permitted her to see. "I, your servant, have beheld four ploughs, ploughing the whole of Ireland, while sowers were scattering seed. This latter immediately sprung up and began to ripen when rivulets of fresh milk filled the furrows, while the sowers themselves were clothed in white garments. After this I saw others plough, and those who ploughed appeared black. They destroyed with their plough-shares the growing corn; and they sowed tares, which filled the furrows." Saint Patrick addressing the holy Abbess, said: "O holy virgin, you have beheld a true and wonderful vision. This is its interpretation: We are God's ploughers who, with the shares of the four Gospels cultivate human hearts, and sow God's words, while those rivers, containing the milk of Christian Faith, proceed from our labours. But towards the end of this world, bad teachers shall preach to depraved generations, who will

receive them. Those teachers shall destroy our instructions, and shall seduce nearly the whole human race." A Protestant writer, the Rev. Baring-Gould, in his beautiful work, *Lives of the Saints*, maintains that this vision may be interpreted as a prophecy foretelling "the miserable apostasy of the so-called Reformation."

Cill-Dara

The midnight wind roared through the oaks of Kildare,
And a clang from the round tow'r at intervals came,
While Saint Bride at the Altar was kneeling in pray'r,
And her Sisters attended the mystical flame.

- *Richard Dalton Williams, The Hymn of Saint Brigid*

Saint Brigid and her companions were hastening on to the place which is inseparably connected with the most active scenes of her life. Cill-Dara, in her native Leinster, would soon become the theatre of the crowning work of her long and useful career. The Lagenians were more than eager for her to return to the home of her childhood. They manifested their impatience for this event by sending a deputation of their prominent sons to our Saint, praying her to dwell amongst them, and promising her a welcome, regal in its warmth, when she set her blessed feet on her natal soil. On her arrival they welcomed her as a Queen coming into her kingdom. It is said that Crimthann, the reigning monarch of Leinster, generously assisted our Saint to found the great religious establishment which has made Cill-Dara (Kildare) famous in the Annals of the Irish Church. The rich owners of the soil willingly offered Saint Brigid a free gift of any part of their possessions she might select for a site whereon to build the chief Monastery of the Nuns of Erin. She had but to make her selection, and their property would pass into her hands for her free use and benefit. The holy Abbess was not slow to decide upon one of the most desirable situations amongst the many offered to her by the generous sons of Leinster. Overlooking the fertile plain of the Liffey, there was a splendid stretch of ground, which seemed to her particularly well-suited for the purposes she had in view. It was styled from ancient times, Druim-Criadh, or "the ridge of clay." An

oak tree of extraordinary size, with branches stretched out as if preserving the ground for the high and noble end for which it was chosen, attracted our Saint's attention. This giant oak survived the fury of the many storms that raged through its branches down to the tenth century. No one dare touch or injure the sacred tree of Saint Brigid. Under the shadow of this oak, Saint Brigid built her oratory.

Having selected the site which was to be the scene of her labours for the remaining years of her life, Saint Brigid paid a visit to the house of her father. Her mother had died during the Saint's long absence in other parts of Ireland. Dubtach, her father, and her relatives prepared a warm welcome for her. She remained only one night under the parental roof. During her sleep an angel appeared to her and warned her of a terrible disaster which threatened the lives of those near and dear to her by ties of blood. Thus spoke the angel:

"Arise immediately and arouse your father, with his whole family, and your religious daughters, now sleeping, for with an intention of murdering your father and his household, an enemy approaches. But the Lord will prevent such intention on your account Depart instantly from this house, for the foe will set it on fire." The Saint obeyed the order and warned the inmates. All fled from the house in time to save their lives. They had gone only a short distance when they beheld, with sorrow, their home devoured by fire, which the hands of their enemies had kindled. Dubtach cried out to his daughter: "O holy Brigid, thy blessing has preserved us this night from impending death. We are now conscious of all those wonderful things predicted concerning thee." Saint Brigid answering said: "Not only this night, but so long as you live, blood shall not be shed within your dwelling."!

When she returned to her new home, which was soon to develop into a religious establishment of vast dimensions, one of the Sisters said to her: "I pray that the angel of the

Lord may always assist you, as he has done, during the past night, by the liberation of yourself, your father and his family." "Not only during this night," said the Saint, "but in every age, I shall have the Lord's assistance in all things, through the ministry of His angels. For daily do I experience a great joy of spirit, while I hear through divine inspiration, songs, spiritual canticles, and strains of heavenly organs. I am able also to hear every day those sacred Masses which are offered in honour of the Almighty in distant parts of the world, in like manner as if I were present at their celebration, while the angels of God present my prayers to heaven day and night. Wherever I am the Lord always hears me, as I will show by the following two incidents: On a particular occasion a certain woman, who was a leper and infirm, asked me to bring her water, and to perform some other charitable offices for her. Whereupon, I blessed the vessel which was filled with the water, and presented it, telling her to place the vessel between herself and the wall, so that no person should be able to touch it until her return. But, in my presence, the angel of the Lord blessed that water, and it was turned into whatever kind of liquid the leper desired; thus, it had the taste of honey when this was wished for, and again the taste of wine, of beer, of milk, or of any other liquid that infirm woman especially required. Again, when I was a little girl, I fashioned an altar-stone in honour of my God, yet with child-like intent. Then an angel of the Almighty, in my presence, perforated the stone at its four angles, and placed at each of them four wooden feet. That you may glorify our Lord Jesus Christ I have mentioned, O daughter, these two interpositions of my Angel Guardian. Thus the grace of God hath always continued with me."

We find the above-narrated events faithfully chronicled in the Third and Fourth Lives of Saint Brigid. The circumstantial and detailed manner in which they are related by men of such learning and sanctity, as the writers of these lives

undoubtedly were, ought to disarm all criticism and dispel all doubts from reasonable minds concerning their authenticity.

The work on which the holy Abbess had set her heart was, under Divine Providence, progressing with giant strides. The buildings were almost daily being enlarged to accommodate the number of virgins and widows who came to place themselves under the spiritual direction of our Saint. Cill-Dara was to become a great ecclesiastical centre, to which the whole country would look for light and leading in building up the magnificent and stately structure of a solid and indestructible Catholic Ireland. The conventual establishment of Cill-Dara (Kildare) was to be the mother-house of a vast army of Erin's daughters, who, by vows of religion, would consecrate their lives to the service of God.

Gratifying beyond measure to the heart of Saint Brigid, a true Spouse of Christ, must have been the frequent arrival at her Convent of young ladies of noble birth and education, praying for admittance to the religious life. They left home and friends to devote themselves to the rigorous and exacting life of a thrice-vowed servant of the Most High. They came, not only from Ireland, but from lands beyond the sea. From Britain and the Continent they journeyed to place themselves under the direction of the holy Abbess, Brigid, whose fame for sanctity had reached the countries of their birth. The cells of the Community now stretched over a vast tract of land, and formed the nucleus of a populous and progressive city. The beginnings of this great religious establishment are thus graphically described by the writer of one of the ancient lives of the Saint. Cogitous, a monk of Kildare, who flourished and wrote in the eighth century, says: "When the most glorious virgin, Brigid, returned to her own country, she was received with great honour and with great joy by the whole province, and there a cell was

assigned to her, in which the Saint of God led a wonderful life. There she erected a monastery of many virgins, and there, in honour of Saint Brigid, a very great city afterwards sprung up, which is at this day the metropolis of the Lagenians. That cell is called in the Celtic tongue, Kill-Dara, which sounds in Latin Cella-Quercus, that is the 'Cell of the Oak.' For there was a very high oak tree there which Saint Brigid loved much and blessed, of which the trunk still remains. No one dares to cut it; but he who can break off a particle of it with his hands deems it a great treasure, hoping for the aid of God by means of it, because through the benediction of Saint Brigid many miracles have been performed by that wood. The name borne by the monastery was given also to the city."

In the famous "Book of Lismore," in the possession of the Devonshire family, many particulars of the erection of the Kildare monastery are given. The Irish life of the Saint contained in that priceless book relates that Saint Mel, who received the profession of Saint Brigid in Ardagh, was invited to aid her in marking out the site of her new foundation. Whilst engaged in this work, it is said, Ailill, a great chieftain of Leinster, passed by with a hundred horse-loads of wattles, with which he intended to build a palace. Saint Brigid told some of the nuns to ask him for these materials to construct the great Convent of Kildare. To the request of the Sisters Ailill gave a somewhat curt and decided refusal. He was forced to change his mind on beholding the horses drawing the wattles fall, as if stricken dead, to the ground. He had to acknowledge the intervention of Divine Providence on behalf of the Saint and her Community. The drivers urged the horses with loud-sounding lashes of their thick whips to rise to their feet, and draw their burdens to their destination. But all to no purpose. Drivers and horses seemed as if fixed to the ground. The wattles were given to a more sacred use than

that for which Ailill at first intended them. He gave not only the materials for the erection of the Convent, but also paid the "Saoir," or skilled workmen, their wages until it was completed. The Saint, in token of her gratitude for this favour, gladdened the heart of the renowned warrior by telling him that he would soon succeed to the throne of Leinster. She also foretold that the occupancy of the throne would remain amongst his descendants, and that they would be always able to overcome their enemies on the battlefield. Two of this King's daughters are honoured as Saints in the Calendar of the Irish Church.

Saint Brigid's religious establishment soon became a centre of pilgrimage for the bishops, priests, chieftains, and the faithful of all Ireland. Prelates came to consult the holy Abbess on Church affairs. Chieftains came to ask a blessing for the success of their arms, the people came to see the great wonder-worker and obtain spiritual and temporal favours; the poor and the suffering came to her as their friend and comforter in their sad and needy state. Kings vied with one another in showering rich gifts and royal favours upon this home of sanctity, presided over by Saint Brigid. This city, as it really had become, was regarded as a place of refuge and sanctuary for those who had gained the displeasure either of their spiritual or temporal rulers. No one dared violate it, or lay sacrilegious hands upon those who had fled there to avail themselves of its sacred privileges.

Within a short distance of the Monastery, the famous Curragh of Kildare, with its undulating and verdant plains, afforded rich and luxuriant pasturage for the flocks needed for the use of the numerous inhabitants of the city. The Saint had a particular affection for tending the flocks that roamed over these rich lands. The Curragh derives its name from the fact that, from the most ancient times in our history, it was

used for chariot races and national games. From all parts of Ireland the people came to witness the great feats performed by their manhood, and by their swift and stately steeds on this ideal recreation ground. The name Curragh is derived from the Latin word *Cursus* (a race). This magnificent stretch of pasture land was called for centuries "the Pasture of Saint Brigid" A beautiful legend connected with the Curragh is found in her earliest lives. It is so beautiful that it would be a pity to omit it, when mention is made of the Curragh of Kildare. The Saint was one day journeying along the Curragh when she saw a youthful student, by name Nennidh, running wildly across her path as if he were hotly pursuing some imaginary object, or endeavouring to escape capture. The Saint called the young man to her and asked him whither he was going at such a rapid pace. The youth made rather a flippant reply, and said: "I am hurrying on towards the Kingdom of Heaven." Said the Saint: "The Son of the Virgin knows that he is happy who makes that journey. Pray to God for me that I, too, may run along the road that leads to that blissful land." Nennidh answered: "My dread is lest the gates of heaven may be closed against me; but, O Veiled Nun! do thou pray for me that heaven may be mine." Brigid said to him: "Thou shalt be a priest, and it is from your hands that I shall receive the Holy Viaticum of the Body and Blood of my Lord Jesus Christ when I am dying." The young man did not take the Saint's words seriously. Nennidh, through the prayers of Saint Brigid, received the blessing of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state. After this meeting with the Saint, who uttered the remarkable prophecy about his future life, the young man, hitherto giddy and careless about his studies, devoted himself to great austerities and applied his mind assiduously to the Sacred Sciences. He was raised to the dignity of the priesthood in due time, and proved himself in every way worthy of his sacred calling. He remembered always that it was to be his special privilege to administer

the Holy Viaticum to Ireland's great Patroness. He kept stainless the hand which was destined to administer this last consoling rite of the Church. He was called for this reason Lamh-Glan, that is "Nennidh of the clean hand." He went to Britain, and there laboured zealously for the conversion of souls. He also made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostles in Rome, to make open profession of the deep faith that filled his pure soul. He returned to Ireland shortly before Saint Brigid's death, and had the happiness of administering to her the Holy Sacraments, and of witnessing the passing of a Saint from earth to heaven. The blessing given to Nennidh by Saint Brigid caused her to be looked upon by ecclesiastical students for centuries afterwards as their special patroness and guardian. She is referred to, in the ancient lives, as having been selected by the Irish Church to watch over and guide the footsteps of youth aspiring to serve God within the Sanctuary. "The Almighty will grant to them," says the writer of an Irish Life of the Saint, "through the protection of Brigid, the perfection of every blessing for which they pray."

The growth and extension of our Saint's ecclesiastical settlement seemed, indeed, to know no bounds. She had contemplated, it is true, the foundation and building up of a large religious establishment which would serve as a training ground for the future nuns of Ireland. In a comparatively short space of time, she beheld a city quickly springing into life and activity round her Convent walls. All roads, in Ireland of those glorious Catholic days, led to Cill-Dara. Thousands of souls had to be catered for, and their spiritual wants looked after, by zealous ministers of God's Church. The Saint made application to Saint Patrick to appoint a Bishop, who would take spiritual charge of the



Sisters and pilgrims, and hold ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the surrounding territory. A holy recluse, who lived in the Southern Plains of Liffey, at Old Connell, near the present town of Newbridge, was selected by Saint Brigid as the most suitable person to hold the high and important office of first Bishop and Abbot of Kildare. Saint Patrick gladly and willingly approved of her choice. Conlaeth was the name of this austere and saintly recluse. He was duly installed as Bishop, and gathered round him a select band of priests to perform the various offices in the great Church which Saint Brigid had built for the worship of God, in the grounds of her Monastery. The appointment of Saint Conlaeth, or Conlain, took place about the year 490. He is styled in the Fourth Life of Saint Brigid, "a holy Bishop and Prophet of God." During his episcopate he made a pilgrimage to Rome. Whilst there he purchased some precious vestments for the use of his Cathedral Church in Kildare. Referring to this pilgrimage, Saint Brogan, in his "Metrical Life of Saint Brigid," says: "She (Saint Brigid) blessed the vestments of Conlaeth which he brought with him from Leatha (Rome)." These costly and valuable vestments Saint Brigid afterwards, when hard pressed to supply the wants of the poor, distributed amongst them to enable them to purchase food and raiment. Cogitosus, in his Life of the Saint, records this wonderful act of charity: "She (Brigid) gave to the poor even the transmarine and rare vestments of Bishop Conlaeth, of glorious light, which he was accustomed to use when offering the Sacred Mysteries at the Altars on the Festivals of our Lord and the Vigils of the Apostles."

Besides devoting himself to his episcopal duties, Saint Conlaeth employed his spare time in making beautifully executed ornaments, in gold and silver, for his Church. He was a skilled artificer in gold and silver. He was known as "Brigid's Brazier." In the museum of the Royal Irish Academy is preserved a crozier, said to have belonged to Saint

Finnbharr of Termon-Barry, in Connacht, and made by the hands of Saint Conlaeth. He governed the See of Kildare for a period of twenty years. Under his wise and generous rule the affairs of the Church of Kildare prospered to such an extent that this See was looked upon as the first and most important, not only in Leinster, but in Ireland. Kildare became a great Catholic city, renowned for its religious and intellectual life. The Annals of the Four Masters chronicle his (Saint Conlaeth's) death in the year 519. Some ancient authors assert that his death was caused in a violent manner. He was torn to pieces by ravenous wolves. His relics were recovered and reverently placed in a precious shrine of gold and silver.

Kildare was besieged by visitors from all parts of Ireland and beyond the seas. Saints came to see the holy Abbess and hold sweet converse with her. They consulted her in their spiritual difficulties, and in matters relating to the welfare of the flocks of which they were pastors. We may select a few of the most eminent amongst them who made a pilgrimage to Kildare. Saint Ibar was the founder of a monastery for men on the plains of the Liffey. He had given considerable assistance to our Saint in establishing her Convent. He came frequently to seek advice from this fountain of heavenly wisdom, the Abbess of Kildare. At his request our Saint composed a beautiful hymn of spiritual desires, "that," as she said, "she might make a feast for Jesus in her heart." When there was a great scarcity of food in Kildare, owing to the partial failure of the wheat harvest, she blessed the corn in the monastery fields of Saint Ibar, and sufficient for both monks and nuns was produced as a result of her blessing.

Saint Fiech, Bishop of Sletty, also came to take counsel with our Saint. He founded the great school of Sletty. This famous monastery was situated in Queen's County, not far from Carlow. It flourished in the beginning of the sixth century.

Saint Fiech was a writer of great eminence in the Celtic tongue. His poem in praise of Saint Patrick is one of the classics of that beautiful and mellifluous language.

Saint Finnian, the founder of the great monastery of Clonard, availed himself of an invitation sent by Saint Brigid to visit Kildare and give a discourse to her nuns on heavenly things. He was a native of Leinster, and "like the sun in the firmament, he enlightened the western world by the rays of his virtues."

Saint Kevin, of Glendalough, when a young man, visited Saint Brigid, and sought her advice as to the state of life he should embrace. The Saint advised him to cast aside all worldly cares and honours, and to assume the penitential garb of the anchorite. He led a life of severest mortification and self-denial. The famous monastery and schools of Glendalough owe their foundation to him.

From the north of Ireland, the infant son of a celebrated Irish chieftain was brought to Kildare. His parents wished Saint Brigid to stand sponsor for their child, and to have the sacramental waters poured on his head in the great Church attached to her Convent. At the Saint's request the name Tighernach was given to him. She prophesied that he would become a learned and saintly ecclesiastic. Her prophecy was realized, for Tighernach became a Bishop of great sanctity and founded the school of Clones. In the Irish Kalendars he is mentioned as the second Bishop of Clogher.

Eight prelates came from a Church called Tolach na nEspuc, or "the hill of the Bishops," to see Saint Brigid. She was then living on the shore of a lake not far from Kildare. These holy men travelled a long distance from their home to pay their homage to her, of whose sanctity and miracles they had heard such wonderful accounts. Their Church was situated in

the County of Dublin, between Loughlinstown and Cabinteely. The ruins of this ancient structure remain to remind us of the grandeur and beauty of the Churches raised by our forefathers to the honour and glory of God. Saint Brigid was highly pleased to receive a visit from these holy ecclesiastics. She went at once to her cook, Bliatha (Latinised, Flora), and told her to provide for their hospitable entertainment. She was astonished to find that the larder was empty, and worse still, not a drop of milk could be found to slake the thirst of the weary and foot-sore travellers. The Saint, as was her wont in time of emergency, had recourse to fervent and earnest prayer. An angel, it is said, helped her out of the difficult and embarrassing situation. The messenger of God commanded her to milk the cows, which had already supplied their daily quantity. The Saint did as the angel ordered. The pails in her dairy were filled to overflowing, and the larder was filled with viands sufficient to supply the wants, not only of the travellers, but also of the numberless poor who hourly arrived in search of hospitality. The spot where this miracle took place was known to the inhabitants for centuries afterwards as Loch-Leamnachta, or "the lake of milk."

It was customary for Saint Brigid to invite certain bishops and priests, renowned for their piety and eloquence to visit Kildare, and there expound the word of God to the people. The latter came from long distances to hear Saint Brigid's preachers, and profit by their exhortations. The presence of these preachers was availed of by many to frequent the Sacraments and make their peace with God before returning to their homes. These spiritual reunions were productive of great spiritual blessings to those attending them. Many converts were made by the forcible arguments in favour of Christianity placed before the minds of the followers of Druidism. Provincial Missions these gatherings in Kildare might be aptly termed, for they were intended to intensify

the faith in the hearts of the Catholics, and urge them to the practice of its principles, and to sow the good seed of Christian belief in the minds of those who had not yet fallen under the gentle sway of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The roads leading to Saint Brigid's Monastery and Church were constantly filled with a vast army of the poor and the infirm, eagerly making their way to the presence of the Saint, from whom they lavishly received the necessities of life and obtained relief from their sufferings. They were assured that having asked for assistance they would not be spurned from her door. All connected with the Convent received strict orders to at once attend to the sick and poor, whenever and at whatever hour they knocked at the gate. Whoever else might want imperative orders, under the strictest penalties, were given that the poor and needy had the first claim on the resources of the Convent. Many miracles of the multiplication of food for the use of the poor are recorded in her ancient lives. Innumerable, too, are the miracles related by which Saint Brigid healed many from incurable diseases, and restored to renewed health and vigour those whose cases were deemed hopeless by their physicians and friends.

The Church was crowded daily at the services. These were performed in the most solemn and edifying manner by a band of clerics, specially selected by our Saint for that purpose. It was her constant care to have the beautiful and inspiring ceremonial of the Catholic Church carried out in a scrupulously correct and befitting manner. These religious ceremonies attracted thousands from far and near to witness them, and by their reverent presence and attention add to their splendour and magnificence.

The minute and detailed description given by Cogitosus, a writer of a Latin life of Saint Brigid, and a monk of Kildare in

the eighth century, will serve to give our readers an idea of the architectural beauty and majestic proportions of the Church of Saint Brigid, as it existed in his day. Of all the ancient writers on ecclesiastical buildings, he is, perhaps, the most complete in detailing the special architectural features in the Cathedral Churches of those early times. "In the Church of Kildare," he says, "repose the glorious bodies of the chief Bishop Conlaeth and of the most illustrious virgin, Brigid, on the right and left of the decorated altar, enshrined in monuments adorned with various ornaments of silver and gold, and gems and precious stones, with crowns of gold and silver depending from above, with various images and variegated embellishments, and thus the new is added to the old. For, the number of faithful increasing, the Church was built occupying a spacious area, and elevated to a marvellous height, enriched within with painted figures, and having oratories separated by boarded partitions under the one roof of the greater edifice. One partition, decorated and covered with pictures and tapestry, extended across the building from wall to wall in the eastern part of the Church (that is, at the back of the altar), and at its extremities it has two doors, through one of which, placed to the right, is the entrance to the sanctuary, where the chief prelate, accompanied by his clergy, and those who are deputed to the service of the altar, offers the Sacred and Dominical Sacrifice; and through the other door, placed in the left, the Abbess, with her faithful virgins and widows, approaches to partake of the Banquet of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. But another partition, stretching along the pavement of the building, and extending from the western end of the sanctuary, divides the Church into two equal parts; and there are many windows in the Church, and one ornamented doorway to the right, through which the clergy and faithful of the male sex enter the Church, and another doorway to the left, through which maidens and the congregation of the faithful women are accustomed to enter. Thus, in one chief

basilica, a multitude of people, differing in rank and sex and position, and separated by partitions in varied order, but with one mind, worship the Omnipotent God."

Saint Brigid could not possibly remain constantly in her beloved Kildare. She had to visit the various houses under her jurisdiction, which she had established in the other provinces of Ireland. She was besieged with invitations from bishops to send some of her Sisters to found a Convent or Convents in their territories to help the priests in the discharge of their heavy and onerous duties. The nuns could look after the spiritual and temporal welfare of the sick poor and the instruction of converts now seeking admission in their thousands to the true fold. The priests would be able to go after the stray sheep of the flock and devote themselves to the preaching of the Word with greater freedom and leisure, if the nuns were settled down amongst their people, and the ruins of various Churches, Monasteries, Convents, Townlands, etc., dedicated to Saint Brigid fully testify to the extensive nature of her travels through Ireland to visit the various houses under her charge. From the mother-house in Kildare a constant procession of white-robed Sisters was issuing forth, destined for different parts of their native land to carry on the apostolic work of their holy Foundress. That they accomplished their task in the most satisfactory manner the phenomenal progress and rapid expansion of the Catholic Faith in the first years of its foundation on Irish soil, are sufficient proofs.

A very touching incident in the life of our Saint, related by Cogitosus, is worthy of a place in this chapter before bringing it to a close. Amongst the Sisters under Saint Brigid's immediate charge was one named Daria, who was blind from childhood. This afflicted spiritual daughter Saint Brigid loved with the affection of a mother. They sat side by side in the Convent enclosure, discoursing sweetly of

heavenly things. The hours passed so quickly by, so wrapt were they in their subject, that Brigid did not perceive that the night had passed and that the dawn heralded the birth of another day. It was ushered in with all the attendant splendours of a perfect summer day in Ireland. When Saint Brigid beheld the plains of Kildare, bathed in a dazzling sunlight, she threw herself on her knees, and in fervent accents thanked the great Creator, Who made earth and sky so beautiful for mortal eyes to feast upon. Her heart was sad that her sightless companion could not behold the beauty of the handiwork of the Creator, upon which she gazed in ecstasy. She prayed that God might permit Daria to enjoy the enchanting panorama spread out before them. The request was granted. Saint Brigid gently kissed her companion, and the latter's eyes looked, for the first time, on the transcendent beauty of the scene which had captured the heart of the Abbess. Having looked again and again in wild raptures of delight on the glorious landscape that lay before them, Daria, much to the Saint's consternation, turned to her and said: "Mother, shut my eyes again, for I fear lest the more I enjoy the sight of earthly things, the less I may be able to see the heavenly, things." Needless to say that Saint Brigid hesitated to comply with the wish expressed by Daria. But the servant of God would not be put off. At last Saint Brigid was compelled to yield from the motive put forward by Daria, and touching the eyes of her spiritual child they returned to the sightless condition in which she was born.

"Laborare est Orare"

There, unity of Work and Will
Blent hundreds into one.
- *Mangan*

The ancient lives of Saint Brigid speak of her, not only as a virgin of the highest sanctity, but also as one endowed with extraordinary intellectual attainments. She, like all the daughters of Erin of noble birth, had received a liberal and high-class education in her youth. When she had attained to the exalted position of Abbess of the great Convent of Kildare, she made use of the talents which God had given her for the benefit of those who were not so gifted. She found herself responsible to God for the direction of the lives of hundreds of vowed maidens, who voluntarily placed themselves under her spiritual guidance. Now these came from all grades of society. The daughters of kings, princes, and chieftains, as well as the children of poor parents, formed her community. Some, like herself, were women of education and culture; others were unlettered, peasant girls, whose only possessions were rude health and a capacity for manual labour. It was necessary to utilise to advantage the various talents which the saintly Abbess discovered amongst her many followers. She was determined they should not live a selfish or an idle life. The sanctification of their individual souls was naturally the chief object upon which their minds and hearts should be constantly and assiduously concentrated. This was the Alpha and Omega of their religious existence. But there was a great and glorious work to be done for the Irish Church. Teachers were required to instruct the youth of the flock of Christ in the rudiments of the faith and in the acquisition of human knowledge; the poor wanted friends to alleviate their distress; the sick

needed ministering angels to help and comfort them in their sorrows and sufferings; the fields had to be tilled to produce the necessities of life for the Community and their numerous visitors and retainers. Saint Brigid understood the practical value of the axiom: "Laborare est Orare" - "To work is to pray."

A great city was growing up round her monastery, and the nuns must give an example of industry and active occupation to those about them. Hence arose the necessity of dividing the day between the duty of prayer and those of mental and manual labour. Idleness was banished from the precincts of the Convent, as the fruitful source of the many evils to which human nature is subject. Sin and its terrible consequences follow swiftly in the train of an indulgent and aimless life. The nuns of Saint Brigid could not find time for idle gossip or murmurings. The peace and joy of a contented mind and of an active and energetic life were their constant companions. The days passed with pleasurable rapidity, bringing them nearer the reward which He Who gave such an example of toil and labour during His life on earth has promised to those who follow in His blessed footsteps.

In the religious houses of men and women, the discipline of fasting was of the most rigorous kind. The daily meal consisted of wheaten bread and milk, and, when procurable, a little fish and eggs. Meat was allowed only on the principal Feasts of the Church. To those employed in manual labour some concessions with regard to quality and quantity of food were made by the Superiors. Though undoubtedly the law of fasting was rigorously enforced, yet every consideration was extended to those who were of less robust constitution, or were prostrated by a temporary illness. A tender care and fraternal solicitude was exhibited towards those who were placed in the category of delicate and sickly Sisters or Brothers in religion. When distinguished guests

visited the religious houses the rigours of fasting were dispensed with, and all joined in partaking of the food placed on the table in honour of the guests. The rules governing the Convents and Monasteries were thoroughly enforced and faithfully observed, for there was in them an absence of unnecessary harshness and galling restraint. They tended to develop in the religious a feeling that the yoke of Christ was a sweet burden, rather than an insufferable yoke, from which there was no release or cessation.

The nuns of Saint Brigid actively assisted the religious communities of men in the many good works they performed for the moral and social welfare of the people. In the offices that came within their womanly sphere, they exhibited a zeal and devotion that reflected the highest credit upon them as followers of Him Whom they had chosen as their Model and Exemplar. They visited and tended the sick, they distributed alms to the poor, they instructed the children in the schools. In all things they proved themselves the enemies of idleness and self-indulgence. They were the ministering angels of the Most High, unceasingly engaged in succouring the wounded soldiers on the battle-field of life. To the people amongst whom they lived, they gave a shining example of courage, perseverance, and ceaseless toil. There were no drones in their serried ranks, for one and all shared the heat and burden of the day, spent in incessant labour in the vineyard of their Lord and Master Jesus Christ. The Irish Church was the arena in which they manifested what the hand and heart of woman can do when actuated and strengthened by an all-consuming love for God and His creatures.

Having quoted the rule of Saint Columbanus, which says: "Therefore we must daily fast as well as pray daily; we must work as well as study," the learned Archbishop of Tuam pays

this tribute to the religious orders and their works: "How patiently and unselfishly that toil was performed the history of Europe tells. The monks made roads, cleared the forests, and fertilised the desert Their monasteries in Ireland were the sites of our cities. To this day the land about a monastery is well known to be the greenest and best in the district, and it was made fertile by the labour of the monks. They preserved for us the literary treasures of antiquity, they multiplied copies of all the best and newest works, they illuminated them with the most loving care. They taught the children of the rich and poor alike; they built the Church and the palace; they were the greatest authors, painters, architects, since the decline of the Roman Empire. They were the physicians of the poor when there were no dispensary doctors; they served the sick in their hospitals and at their homes. And when the day's work was done in the fields, or in the study, they praised God, and prayed for men who were unable or unwilling to pray for themselves. Ignorant and prejudiced men have spoken of them as an idle and useless race. They were in reality the greatest toilers and the greatest benefactors of humanity that the world has ever seen."

This beautiful and well-deserved eulogy on the religious communities of Irish monks and nuns of bygone days from the facile and erudite pen of the Archbishop of Tuam should be carefully studied by the Catholic children of Ireland of the present time. A true and faithful picture these eloquent words convey of the work performed for Irish Catholics by those devoted servants of God. We, happily, enjoy the fruit of their labours. The effect of their earnest work to establish the Church of God on a firm foundation can never be forgotten by those who inherit the faith they taught, by word and example, to the valiant sons and virtuous daughters of Holy Ireland. Were it not for the labours and self-sacrifice of these consecrated virgins and saintly men of old, Ireland

could never lay claim to the enviable title she proudly bears of the "Island of Saints and Scholars."

When we consider the various classes of works which required constant care and attention in the spacious and well-filled monastery of Saint Brigid at Kildare, we can well imagine what a busy hive of industry it must have been. The Curragh of Kildare was Brigid's pasture-ground. The numerous flocks which roamed over its green sward had to be looked after and cared for. The white wool of the sheep had to be shorn from their backs at stated times and woven into habits and garments for the nuns, and warm clothing for the poor and needy, who thronged round the Convent gate when the harsh winds of winter swept across the plains of Kildare. The cows which supplied the substantial beverage for the Sisters' refectory, for the many visitors seeking hospitality, and for the sick poor, had to be fed and milked by the members of the Community. The extensive dairy, where butter and cheese were made, required many Sisters to keep up the supplies needed for the numerous family of the holy Abbess, and for the many demands made upon its resources inside and outside the monastery.

Saint Brigid took a particular delight in tending her flocks on the Curragh. She loved to feed them with her own hands and lead them from pasture to pasture. A beautiful legend is recorded in her life of her love for tending sheep. She had spent an entire day of ceaseless rain as shepherdess over the herds on the Curragh. When she returned to her Convent, the Sisters beheld with horror that the clothes of their beloved Abbess were saturated with rain. When she entered, a certain wise and holy man was preaching to the Sisters. She was so interested in the discourse that she became oblivious of the state of her garments. A sunbeam entered her cell and the clothes were rapidly dried and heated by miraculous intervention. A Protestant writer, the

Rev. Baring-Gould, relates this miracle in his Life of the Saint published in his beautiful work, *Lives of the Saints*.

This predilection for tending the flocks at pasture is referred to in an ancient Irish poem:

"The Blessed Bridghit loved
Constant piety, which was not prescribed;
Sheep herding and early rising,
Hospitality to men of virtue."

That Saint Brigid's life was full of energetic and constant activity the number of her miracles fully attest. What an army of poor she must have relieved daily with her own hands? The sick, and there were many afflicted ones, received constant care and attention. The tribesmen, who loved with a filial love "the veiled virgin who drives over the Curragh," came to her in every sorrow and difficulty. Their disputes and contentions were referred to her for settlement. When their crops were in peril of being damaged or lost through the inclemency of the season, they appealed to her to raise her hands to Heaven in prayer that the fruit of their labours might not perish, but be spared and multiplied. No queen on her throne wielded greater power over, or gained such loving affection from her subjects, as did Saint Brigid from those who never appealed in vain for her help and assistance. We may well be certain that, in helping these honest husbandmen in their temporal necessities, she did not neglect to advise them to sanctify their souls and keep them in the paths of rectitude. Consider, too, how much time she must have devoted to the reception of the many visitors who daily sought the hospitality of her Convent. They came from afar to consult with her on spiritual matters, or to seek some heavenly favour for themselves and their families through her powerful prayers and intercession. Kings and princes sought her advice in the government of their

subjects. Bishops were desirous of gaining her approval before venturing on some new project for the advancement of religion. Priests came to her to solve the many difficulties and consult her on delicate questions with which they were confronted in the exercise of their sacred ministry. She found time for all, no matter at what hour of the day or night her visitors might call for her services. Like her Divine Master, she was happiest when surrounded by the poor. Though the noblest in the land might arrive at the Convent gates, she would not show the least sign of pride or pleasure at the presence of such distinguished personages. As an instance of her preference for receiving the poor of Christ rather than the rich and noble, it is related that she once refused to see the daughter-in-law of King Connail. A Sister asked her why she preferred to receive the wives of peasants rather than the great ladies of the Court? Saint Brigid made the following reply: "Sister, the poor and the peasants are almost all good and pious, but the offspring of kings are serpents, children of blood and wickedness, except a small number of elect."

It must not be inferred, however, from this particular instance that the holy Abbess was not generous and hospitable in the welcome she extended to the kings and princes who came to the "Cell of the Oak." On the contrary, she insisted on the highest mark of respect being paid to their exalted dignity and the most lavish hospitality bestowed upon them and their retainers. At the great Festivals of Christmas and Easter, these royal and noble personages, with their various Court officials, came in full state to celebrate, with the thousands of pilgrims gathered in this consecrated spot, the two most solemn and glorious feasts of the ecclesiastical year. We find in her ancient lives that she enjoyed the friendship of and received generous gifts from the kings and princes of her country. It was incumbent on the Kings of Leinster, by virtue of the Brehon

Laws, to extend their powerful protection to Kildare, and to give every pecuniary assistance to Saint Brigid and her Community when they sought or requested their aid.

We have seen that Saint Conlaeth, the first Bishop of Kildare, was known throughout Ireland as "Saint Brigid's Brazier." He was proficient in the art of designing and making the precious silver and gold vessels and ornaments, requisite for the service and adornment of the Church. Saint Brigid formed a school, under his management and direction, for instruction in gold and silver work. Chalice of exquisite design and delicate workmanship were made in Kildare, to supply the wants of her own and the many Churches now being built throughout the island. Bells were also manufactured by Saint Conlaeth and his young artificers. Many of the nuns were employed in designing these works of art, and in helping the young to gain a skilled knowledge of this most useful and beautiful handicraft. From the few specimens preserved to us out of the many spoils to which our religious institutions and treasures were subjected, we may gain some idea of the high state of perfection attained in ancient Ireland by those devoted to the art of metal-working.

Though manual labour formed a very important part in the daily life of Saint Brigid's sisterhood, it must not be thought that the intellectual domain was left practically uncultivated. The Sisters, with Saint Brigid's energy and example to stimulate them, had a wide scope for their untiring zeal in the management and direction of the scholars that flocked from all parts of Ireland to their schools. It was the custom in ancient Ireland that wherever a Convent or Monastery was erected, there also should be established a school under the care of the nuns or monks. Religion and education were always to be found side by side in the place where religious communities had taken up their

dwelling. The great schools of our Island, which were the pride of Ireland and the envy of the nations, were founded and conducted by the religious Orders. The School of Kildare established by Saint Brigid, is numbered amongst the four principal and most famous of the Schools which have won for our country the praise and applause of the Christian world. We may well imagine what a tax was put upon the Sisters of Saint Brigid to organise schools for the children of the poor, as well as for those of the wealthier classes. The poorer classes had to be instructed, not only in the doctrines and practices of their faith, but also in the various branches of knowledge, useful for their avocations in life. Those who have practical experience of the stress and strain inseparable from the daily routine of school-work will readily understand that labour of the most trying and exhausting character was the lot of those associated with Saint Brigid in the maintenance and management of her well-filled schools. It is certain that there was no room or place for the idler or drone in the establishment of Kildare. The flippant taunt that the nuns and monks of old were lazy, idle, good-for-nothing creatures, uttered or written by prejudiced and ignorant speakers and writers, is as groundless as it is unjust and libellous.

When the school-work was done the Sisters did not rest completely from their labours. The hours they could spare from school and choir duties were devoted to the making of vestments for the altar, or clothes for the poor. The Sacred Vestments used in the Holy Sacrifice were made by the hands of the Sisters. These were beautifully embroidered by the expert needle-women amongst them. We have not extant any specimens of their delicate workmanship amongst the treasures of Ireland's past. The "Book of Kells" contains some examples of the Sacred Vestments, from which we may judge how richly and artistically ornamented they were by the nimble and dexterous fingers of the nuns.

Saint Patrick's vestments and Church linen were made by these holy women. Saint Columbkille had his own special embroiderers for working his vestments and altar cloths.

The art of illuminating and copying was always practised in the ancient Convents and Monasteries. Were it not for the indefatigable industry in this most useful art of the monks and the nuns, very little of our country's religious and secular history would be in our possession today. The Scriptorium, or writing-room, formed an indispensable adjunct to every religious establishment. There, at all hours of the day and far into the night, were to be found scribes, writers, and illuminators. Saint Brigid collected the most distinguished and expert exponents of the illuminator's art to teach her spiritual daughters. To be an accomplished scribe was the ambition of the dwellers in the Convents and Monasteries. The Celtic illuminators were easily first against all competitors. The "Book of Kells" alone, not to mention others, would clearly establish the excellence of the Irish religious as masters in the art of copying and illuminating. So wonderfully executed are the designs and tracery illuminating this world-renowned book, now preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, that many have said that the work was not done by the hands of man but by those of angels.

Saint Brigid caused the Four Gospels to be copied and illuminated by specially selected scribes, she herself superintending and directing their labours. The letters were copied in gold. A well-authenticated legend connected with this work is contained in her ancient lives. When the principal scribe, or copyist, was engaged in his tedious and difficult task, an angel appeared to him, presenting to his astonished gaze a tablet containing the most beautiful figures and designs. The angel bade him take up his pen and make a faithful copy of the original for use in the

illumination of the work upon which he was engaged. The poor scribe said the request of the angel was impossible, for the figures and designs were beyond his powers to copy or reproduce. The angel then said: "Let the Abbess pour forth her prayers before God's throne, so that the mind may grasp and the eye may discern these figures in all their details, and that your hand may be divinely guided in copying them." The scribe related to Saint Brigid the vision he had seen. The Saint collected her community, and unitedly they poured forth their prayers that the hand of the scribe might be enabled to perform the task set him by the angel of God. These prayers were continued during the progress of the work, and were daily said until the scribe had given the finishing touches to this transcendently beautiful volume of the Four Gospels.

This book was held as a sacred treasure in Kildare. It was preserved in the Monastery there until the twelfth century. It must have perished by the hands of one or other of the desecrating bands that laid waste the monasteries of our country and robbed them of their treasures. Giraldus Cambrensis, who saw the work in that century, thus describes its contents: "Of all the wonders of Kildare, I have found nothing more wonderful than the marvellous book written in the time of Saint Brigid, and, as they say, at the dictation of an angel. The book contains the Concordance of the Gospels according to Saint Jerome, and every page is filled with divers figures, most accurately marked out with various colours. Here you behold a majestic face divinely drawn, there the mystical forms of the Evangelists, each having sometimes six, sometimes four, and sometimes two wings; here an eagle, there a calf, again a human face and a lion, and other figures in infinite variety, so cleverly wrought together that if you looked carelessly at them, they would seem like a uniform blot without skill or study, rather than an exquisite inter-weaving of figures, where all is skill and

perfection of art. But if you look closely, with all the acuteness of sight that you can command, and examine the inmost secrets of that wondrous art, you will discover such delicate, such subtle, such fine and closely-wrought lines, twisted and inter-woven in such intricate knots, and adorned with such fresh and brilliant colours, that you will readily acknowledge the whole to have been the result of angelic rather than human skill. The more frequently I behold it, and the more diligently I examine it, the more numerous are the beauties I discover in it, and the more I am lost in renewed admiration of it."

Saint Brigid was busy too with her own pen, for she wrote, besides a Rule for her Nuns, a Hymn in praise of Saint Patrick. A devotional book, called "The Quiver of Divine Love," was also written by her.

We must conclude from what has been said in this chapter that our Saint knew well how to combine the two obligations of our pilgrimage here below - to work and pray. The mundane employments engaged in by Herself and her community, never interfered with that spirit of constant and uninterrupted communication with Heaven, which was the goal to which all her earthly works and labours were directed.

Her Characteristic Virtues

How few, like thee, enquire the wretched out,
And court the offices of soft humanity.
Like thee, reserve their raiment for the naked.
Reach out their bread to feed the crying orphan,
Or mix the pitying tears with those that weep.

- *N. Rowe*

Saint Brogan, in his metrical life of Saint Brigid, says that "she was a ladder to heaven for very many souls." This is plainly evident from the fact that many of those associated with her in her works of charity and religion, attained to the highest degree of sanctity. In proof of this it is necessary to mention only a few of those who regarded her as their Protectress, and who reached, through her blessed influence, the dignity of saints of the Catholic Church. Her immediate successor in the office of Abbess was Saint Darlugdachau. Saint Laisre, Abbess of Killaisre; Saint Hynna, Virgin; Saint Dana, Virgin; Saint Blathnata, Saint Brigid's cook; Saint Conlaeth, Bishop of Kildare; Saint Nennius, Bishop, and Saint Natfroich, her chaplain, were all associates of Saint Brigid in her great undertakings for the spiritual welfare of the people and the glory of the Irish Church. We must take into account also the number of young ladies she encouraged and assisted in the choice of a religious vocation. It can never be known how many she rescued from the slavery of sin and brought back to the liberty of servants of God. Many bishops and priests, whose names were afterwards inscribed in the Calendar of Irish Saints, were stimulated to perseverance in the exercise of virtue and penance, by the conferences they held with our Saint in her home in Kildare. The magnetic attraction of her own sanctity must have influenced many of both sexes to emulate her

example, and give up all earthly joys and pleasures to follow Christ.

Saint Brigid was a Saint whose sanctity forcibly appealed to the warm-hearted and generous people, amongst whom she lived. There was nothing austere or repulsive in her methods of training the young and inexperienced in the ways of Christian perfection. She gave them a living example of the beauty of holiness and of the joy and happiness attendant on a virtuous life. She lived amongst them as one of themselves, doing good to all, augmenting their happiness and sharing their sorrows. She had the heart of a mother for the erring children of her flock, and the tenderness of a Sister for those in distress. If she found a weak and timorous soul, she infused new life and vigour into it by kindly encouragement and generous help. The sinner was moved to penitential tears by her correction, the wavering one took new courage and hope from her words of timely advice, the perfect were made still more perfect by the inducements she held out to them to climb still higher the holy mountain of perfection. Well, indeed, might Saint Brogan call her "a ladder of heaven to very many souls."

Saint Brogan, who enjoyed the privilege of conversing with our Saint on many occasions during her life, gives us a beautiful pen-picture of Saint Brigid. He places her before us as a Saint, not of rigid austerities, but of a sweetness and loveliness that must have won the hearts of all who lived in her days. Her saintly biographer says: "Brigid never loved the world, and her thoughts were ever in heaven. She overflowed with Faith. She never spoke ill of anyone. She was kindhearted and charitable, and had no care but for God alone; and God worked more wonders through her than anyone can relate. She showed the same love to all, to the servants no less than to her spiritual daughters, to the poor and to the sick."

The following hymn in praise of the Patroness of Ireland is a worthy tribute to her exalted sanctity, and a proof of the high esteem and veneration in which she was held by the people of Ireland. The learned Franciscan, Colgan, the collector of the ancient lives of our Saint, attributes its composition to Saint Columba. It is a beautiful eulogy on Saint Brigid from the pen of an Irish Saint, whose name is treasured amongst the children of the Gael in every land:

"Brigid, noble woman!
A flame, golden, beautiful!
A sun, dazzling, splendid!
May she bear us to the eternal kingdom.

May Brigid save us
Despite the throngs of demons.
May she overthrow before us
The battle-hosts of every disease.

May she destroy within us
The debts of our flesh (i.e., our sins),
O blossoming branch!
O Mother of Jesus!

The pure virgin dear to us,
Great her dignity.
May we be always sheltered
By my Saint of the Lagenians.

With Patrick, the pre-eminent,
She is a pillar of the kingdom,
The helper of helpers,
The Queen of Queens.

When in our old age
Our bodies are laid in the shroud,

May Brigid shower blessings upon us,
May Brigid secure salvation for us!"

It is well to remember that the early Irish Saints were accustomed to put their thoughts into flowing verse. A large collection could be made of the hymns composed in honour of Saint Brigid. The saintly authors intended them for the use of the people when they assembled on the great Festivals of the Church, or during their pilgrimages to her many shrines in Ireland. These hymns served the pious purpose of constantly keeping before the minds of the people the many virtues of Saint Brigid, and reminded them of the gratitude and love she merited from them for her noble deeds of charity, and for favours granted to them through her powerful intercession.

In a very ancient metrical life we find another equally beautiful testimony to her special virtues and prerogatives:

"Brigid, Saint of highest fame,
For Christ the world despised;
Like gladsome lark on high she sang,
Virtue alone she prized.

Her only thought were Heaven and God,
Her only joy was pure,
She sought bright mansions in the skies,
And life for aye secure.

And in her waking and her sleep
She pined for Christ, her Love,
And for His cruel suff'rings grieved
With cry like captive dove.

O Brigid! near to Christ, my Lord,
Of earthly souls the best;

Pray still for me that I may come
To His eternal rest."

Saint Brigid was truly "a vessel of election," full of every heavenly virtue that makes the soul pleasing to God and worthy of an immortal recompense. Her modesty was evident from the years of her childhood to the close of her saintly life. An ancient poet-saint thus sings of her in these lines:

"She looked not on the face of man,
Nor husband had, nor brother,
But where she passed the children ran,
And hailed that maid their mother."

A spirit of prayer and self-sacrifice were characteristic of this Holy Virgin. She, amidst all the distractions, consequent upon her busy and active life, never ceased to keep up an uninterrupted intercourse with her Most Holy Spouse. The *Annals of the Four Masters* tell us that "Brigid was she who never turned her mind or attention from the Lord for the space of one hour, but was constantly meditating on and thinking of Him in her heart and mind." It is related of her that she told one of her companions that such was her spirit of recollection that she was able to hear all the Masses offered daily in every quarter of the Globe, and that her heart was filled with a great joy because "through Divine inspiration she heard holy songs, spiritual canticles, and strains of heavenly organs. 11 Self-sacrifice, when charity or duty called, was practised by our Saint in the most perfect manner. The many occasions related in her lives on which she denied herself even the necessities of life that others might benefit, are witnesses to the possession of this noble virtue by the Patroness of Ireland. She was always ready to extend her powerful aid to all who required her assistance, in temporal or spiritual trials.

There is preserved in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, in the sweet Celtic tongue, a prayer attributed to Saint Brigid, in which she pours out her soul to the Most High. This hymn, or prayer, expresses the yearnings of her heart for the virtues with which she would wish the hand of God to adorn her own soul and those of her spiritual children. It also epitomizes the virtues she most loved and put in practice during her life. At an assembly of the clergy at Magh-Femyn, this prayer or hymn is said to have been composed.

"I would like the Food of Divine Faith and pure piety,
with the flails of penance to be our portion;

I would like the angels of Heaven to be amongst us;

I would like the abundance of Peace;

I would like full vessels of Charity;

I would like rich treasures of Mercy;

I would like cheerfulness to preside over all;

I would like Jesus to be present;

I would like the three Marys of illustrious renown to be
with us;

I would like the friends of Heaven (the poor) to be
gathered round us from all parts;

I would like myself to be a rent-payer to the Lord, that I
should suffer distress, and that He would bestow a good
blessing upon me."

It would appear that it was at the urgent request of her friend, Saint Ibar, that Saint Brigid composed this expression

of her yearnings for spiritual things. The reason she assigns for its composition is "that she might make a feast for Jesus in her heart."

The spirit of prophecy was accorded the holy Abbess of Kildare by the Holy Ghost as a mark of her exalted sanctity. While Saint Patrick was preaching in Ulster to a large gathering of people, the congregation noticed that a cloud of surpassing brightness descended from the heavens towards the earth. Saint Brigid, "the pearl of Ireland," was an eager listener on this occasion to the burning eloquence of the national Apostle. This bright meteor, when it came almost in touch with the earth, rested a short distance away from the crowd round Saint Patrick. It then slowly drifted towards the Dun (or Fort) of Leathglass. This Dun is situated near Downpatrick. The congregation were afraid to ask Saint Patrick the meaning of this portent. This manifestation of a supernatural agency seemed to strike terror into their hearts. They would wish to know the meaning and object of this apparition. Instinctively they turned to Saint Brigid, knowing well that she would solve the mystery for them. She referred them to Saint Patrick for the explanation. He turned to Saint Brigid and said: "You and I are equals; therefore explain this mystery to the people." Saint Brigid then addressed the assemblage. She told them that the cloud represented the spirit of Saint Patrick, which went to visit beforehand the place where his precious remains would ultimately be interred. For, she said, "where this meteor first rested near us, there shall the body of our holy patron lie unburied for some days, and thence it shall be brought and interred in Leath-Glasse Dun, where it shall remain to die Day of Judgment."

Some of the ancient records state that Saint Patrick commanded her to weave with her own hands the shroud in which his body should be wrapped after death. The wish of

the Apostle was carried out by his spiritual daughter, Saint Brigid.

Her humility was exhibited in her acceptance of the most menial offices of the Convent in Kildare and during her visits to her branch establishments in various parts of the country. The lowly occupation of shepherdess seemed her special delight and chosen work. During the long vigils of the night, as we have already seen, she tended the flocks on the Curragh. She waited at table and prepared with her own hands the food for the most poverty-stricken amongst those who sought hospitality from the Sisters. It was her custom to wash the feet of the weary and footsore travellers who came to Kildare. The infirmary of the Convent had a particular charm for her. There she was to be seen performing the varied and oft-times disagreeable duties devolving on those who minister to the sick and helpless. She visited, whenever freedom from other duties permitted, the sick poor of the city which had sprung into life round her monastery. She carried wood for their cheerless hearths, took charge with a mother's care of neglected children, and made with her own hands the clothes they required. Amongst the Sisters she wished to be the least, regarding them as superior to herself in sanctity and devotion to their religious vocation. She never assumed an air of superiority, or made those under her feel the power and dignity vested in her as "Head Abbess of Ireland." This fundamental virtue, humility, upon which the whole spiritual edifice is built, attracted the attention and enchanted the hearts of her followers. She wished to appear as an ordinary religious, striving by the aids afforded in the cloister to gain an eternal crown. When praise was bestowed upon her for her charity, her miracles, and the speedy answer received to her prayers, she directed the minds of her admirers to the Author of all Goodness, from Whose bountiful hands alone these blessings came. This meekness and humility of our Saint served to still

further exalt her in the estimation of her spiritual children, and the holy men and women who came to the plains of Kildare to see and converse with "the chaste head of the nuns of Erin."

We find that through the whole narrative of Saint Brigid's life her spirit of mercy and charity stand out in bold relief. She selected the Beatitude of Mercy as her own on the occasion recorded in a former chapter, when she and her companions were called upon to make a selection of their favourite virtue. She had a truly warm Celtic heart, capable of expanding to straining point when the cry of human misery and suffering reached her. She could not bear to see anyone, Pagan or Christian, enduring the pangs of hunger, or tortured on the rack of pain. The knowledge of her wondrous powers of healing the sick brought troops of suffering humanity to her Hospitable doors. She proved herself a physician, to whom no disease, however fatal its nature, proved incurable. She delighted to use her miraculous power on behalf of all who manifested their faith in her possession of it, by undertaking long and wearisome journeys to benefit them.

For the poor, neglected, carefully-shunned lepers, she had a special love and a ready answer to their cry for help. Evidences of this maternal kindness for, and sympathy with, their sad fate, are strewn plentifully through the lives written by her earliest biographers. One touching illustration of her sympathy with and kindness to those afflicted with leprosy is recorded by the ancient writers of her life. While the Saint was travelling, a large concourse of people gathered round her. Two lepers came to her and asked her to cleanse them from their loathsome malady. She commanded them to take some water she had blessed and wash each other's sores. When one had performed this office of charity for his fellow-sufferer, the Saint provided clean garments for his

miraculously healed body. To the one thus freed from the repulsive and horrible disease, the Saint said: "Do you, in like manner, wash your companion." Feeling that he was cleansed, he showed great repugnance to touch the body of his less fortunate companion. He was then told by Saint Brigid that he should not hesitate to do for another what had been done for himself. Yet he showed no sign of willingness to obey the Saint's orders. At last he positively refused to comply with the request of his benefactress. At once the Saint took the water and cleansed the body of the leper and restored it to a state of complete soundness. The ungrateful leper had good reason to repent of his disobedience to the Saint's orders. When he found himself cleansed from the leprosy, he naturally thought there was no possibility of relapsing into his former pitiable state. The crowd, who witnessed both miracles, heard the leper who refused to wash the sores of his brother in distress, cry out in a loud voice: "Just now I feel sparks of fire settling on my shoulders." The leprosy returned to him in a more violent form than before, and his want of charity was thus severely punished, as an example to the beholders.

Many cases are contained in her Acts of the restoration of sight to the blind through Saint Brigid's intercession. We have seen how she caused the sightless eyes of Dana, a member of her Sisterhood, to regain their lost vision, and to gaze with rapture upon the enchanting landscape spread out before them, as if specially designed by an unseen hand to greet the return of light to the poor blind Daria. On another occasion two blind men came from Britain to Saint Brigid in the full hope and confidence that she could restore their vision. They cried out to her: "We are in misery and suffer much; we beg you to heal us." She seemed not to heed their pitiful appeal. All that she could promise them was that she would pray for them, but they would not be put off. "You heal your own countrymen," they said, "when they

are sick, and you will not do anything for us who are strangers." She made no reply, but hurried to the Church and prostrated herself in suppliant prayer for their cure. She returned to them, sprinkled some holy water upon them, and they were at once healed. Many Pagans, say the ancient authors, who stood by, on seeing this miracle, became Christians.

Open-handed charity and hospitality to the poor and needy were characteristic virtues of Saint Brigid Her lives simply bristle with accounts of her liberality to God's poor. She loved them with an intense affection, and never seemed so happy as when ministering to their wants and necessities. Kildare was the home and refuge for the poverty-stricken and afflicted, not only of Leinster, but also of the other provinces of Ireland. Were it not for the miraculous power she possessed of multiplying the stock of food and drink when the necessity arose, she could never have fed the many hungry mendicants that flocked to Kildare. All were received as if they were scions of noble families, and the best of everything in the Convent storehouse was liberally bestowed upon them. Saint Brigid had always before her mind the love of her Divine Spouse for the poor and homeless ones of His flock. A favourite saying of hers was "that Christ was in the person of the poor who possessed the Faith." She told Dunlang, King of Leinster, who upbraided her for having given to the poor the precious sword he had given her father, that if she could she would give them all the riches he possessed In the hymn, or prayer, she composed, she expresses her wish to have "the friends of heaven (the poor) to be gathered round us from all parts."

She insisted on the Sisters of her various communities depriving themselves even of necessities to supply the wants of the poor. They could not refuse to make this sacrifice, considering the wonderful example given to them

daily by their holy Foundress and Abbess. The costly vestments brought from Rome by Saint Conlacth were distributed to the poor when she had no other means of alleviating their distress. The many rich presents, sent by kings and princes as tokens of friendship or gratitude for favours received were converted into alms for the poor. What she received with one hand she quickly gave away with the other to her friends, as she loved to call the poor and afflicted.

In a "Life of Saint Brigid," written for the Catholic Truth Society of Australia, by his Eminence Cardinal Moran, Archbishop of Sydney, the eminent and learned author says: "Reviewing Saint Brigid's career, of which we have presented only a condensed narrative, we cannot but recognise that her whole life was one series of acts of mercy, charity and Divine love. She spent her years cultivating the heavenly seeds of virtue in her own soul, forming the hearts of her zealous religious Sisters to the heroism of piety, diffusing around her monasteries, the fragrance of sanctity, and scattering broadcast the blessings of true charity. She sacrificed the pleasures of earth for the enjoyment of heaven. Her consolation and beatitude during life was to possess God and to do His will. His presence was the light of her soul, His grace was the staff of her pilgrimage, and supported her in every trial; for Him alone she lived on earth, that she might reign with Him in Heaven."

Her Death, Burial, and Relics

Her eyelids drooped, and without strife
To Him she loved her spirit passed.

- *Aubrey De Vere*

The years of Saint Brigid's earthly career were swiftly drawing to a close. Four years before her death she foretold the time and place of its occurrence. From the days of her childhood she had prepared herself for the advent of the reaper, Death, whose scythe is busy amongst the children of men, irrespective of rank or age, in all times and in all places. Her whole life was one long preparation for that sad and inevitable ending to human life. Death could not hold, we may be inclined to imagine, any terrors for such a servant of God as Saint Brigid undoubtedly was. Yet we learn from the lives of the Saints that they, like the rest of mortals, feared the dread moment of their dissolution. They were afraid, in their great humility, that they might be weighed in the balance and found wanting. The last years of her life Saint Brigid utilised as an immediate preparation for her happy departure from this vale of tears and suffering. She longed "to be dissolved and be with Christ" Her work was completed and her crown of glory secured by her saintly life and actions. Now that her earthly mission had brought forth fruit an hundredfold, she could sing her "Nunc Dimittis" and depart in peace. The cohorts of angels were ready to form her bodyguard and conduct her into the presence of Him Whose faithful and loving Spouse she ever was. As she cast her eyes over the fair plains and upon the green hills of her native land, in those last hours of her life, what a tidal wave of spiritual joy and hope must have inundated her soul. Her monasteries were spread over the whole extent of the land. Churches were raised in towns and hamlets to the honour

and glory of the Most High. King and peasant knelt at the same altar, and were linked in a common brotherhood of faith and worship. The altars of the Druids were destroyed, and their false gods banished for ever. The preaching of Saint Patrick and his disciples had given the death blow to superstition and idolatry. The standard of the true faith was planted on every hill, and waved triumphantly over every valley of regenerated Ireland. And when our Saint recalled how much her labours contributed to this happy consummation, she must have rejoiced and blessed Him Who made her the instrument of such apostolic work for the land of her birth and love. Saint Patrick and Saint Brigid are ever associated in the minds of Catholic Ireland with the evangelisation of our country. It has been well said that Saint Brigid was chosen by God to complete the work of Ireland's Apostle, whilst, at the same time, she in part reaped the fruits of his labours. The "one sowed, the other came when the harvest was ripe; the one watered with tears, the other gathered with joy; the one passed on to his reward, when the other culled the most blooming flowers to decorate his festive offering on the day of his departure. "Yes, truly does Saint Brigid merit to be placed on a throne beside our National Apostle. Consider her missionary journeys and the thousands her example and miracles induced to find salvation within the fold of the one true Church. Try, if you can, to approximate the number of holy virgins and widows who gave up all to follow Christ on the advice and counsel of the Abbess of Kildare. Do not forget to enumerate her works of charity and benevolence for the poor, the sick, and the orphans, who might otherwise have been neglected or induced to abandon the faith, had she not spread the mantle of her powerful protection around them. The consideration of her innumerable good deeds and services to strengthen, expand and consolidate, the infant Church of Saint Patrick, will serve to the better understanding and approval of the seemingly extravagant

titles bestowed, and the highly-coloured panegyrics passed upon our Saint by her ancient biographers.

The following beautiful and poetic description of her happy demise will touch an approving chord in the hearts of her children today, who have carefully and piously followed her life-history, unfolded in these pages. The writer says:

"The snow-white rose, whom Christ had made His Spouse in His Blood, was about to be planted in the heavenly garden of her Spouse; the busy bee that had been gathering honey during her whole life-time, was going to where it was stored in the City of God; the wise and faithful virgin was going forth to meet the Divine Bridegroom, with the Lamp of Grace burning brightly in her soul; she was going to drink for ever of the waters of gladness and to eat for ever of the Tree of Life."

The most reliable and authentic Acts of Saint Brigid set down the day of her death as the 1st of February. There is, however, a great divergence of opinion, amongst ancient and modern writers of her life, as to her exact age when she departed from this world. The late Canon O'Hanlon, in his life of the Saint, having examined with scrupulous care the many authorities on the subject, arrives at the conclusion that it must have been in or about the seventieth year of her age. As to the nature of the disease which caused her death, the ancient annals afford no information. A controversy amongst authorities centres round the particular place in which her pure soul took flight to the arms of her blessed Spouse. Kildare, however, lays just claim to having been the place of her departure from the scene of her earthy labours. The late Canon O'Hanlon again throws the weight of his authority on the side of those writers who give this honour to her beloved Cill-Dara.

Feeling that the end was fast approaching, she sent for her favourite spiritual daughter, Darlugdacha. She confided to her the exact day and hour of her death, and commanded her to assume the reins of Government over her many religious houses, when she, their Foundress, had passed away. This timid and pious Sister wept bitterly when she heard the sad message conveyed to her by the holy Abbess. The fact of her appointment as successor to such a Saintly Superioress added greater acuteness to her grief. She prayed to be freed from the burden of authority placed upon her by Saint Brigid, and asked her to pray that they might die together, as she could not bear to part with one whom she so tenderly loved. The Saint said to her by way of comfort and consolation: "My daughter, thou shalt live a whole year after my departure, and then thou shalt follow me." This prediction proved true; for on the same day a year afterwards, Saint Darlugdacha passed to her reward. Thus, these two Spouses of Christ, so united in the bonds of affection during life, are honoured together as Saints of God's Church on the same day of the ecclesiastical year.

Having fully arranged the affairs pertaining to her immediate household and the wise and prudent government of her Order throughout Ireland, the holy Abbess expressed a desire to receive the Last Sacraments of the Church. In this supreme moment of her life, the intervention of Divine Providence was made manifest for the greater glory of God and exaltation of His servant Brigid. The fulfilment of a prophecy uttered by her lips long years before, received its completion on her death-bed. On the Curragh of Kildare, as we have seen in a preceding chapter, she foretold that the reckless and light-hearted student Nennidh, who laughed at her prediction, would eventually become a priest and administer to her the last rites of the Church. And so it came to pass. Nennidh, who was in Rome at the time received a heavenly warning to return without delay to Ireland. The

touching story, perhaps, is best told in the language of an ancient writer: "Now that the last moments of Brigid approached, when she had founded many churches and religious establishments, and erected many altars, and, leading a life of charity and mercy, had performed miracles more numerous than the sands on the sea or the stars of the heavens, Nennidh, of the pure hand, returned from Rome and gave the Communion and Sacrament to her and her pure soul sped its way to heaven." Thus ended the life and labours of the Patroness of Ireland, in the fulfilment of a prophecy and in the sweet embrace of her Heavenly Spouse.

It was long before the cloud of sorrow that hung like a pall, over Kildare especially, and Ireland in general, was dispelled. The Sisters wept for her, as children for the loss of the most affectionate of mothers. The poor were bereft of a generous benefactress. The bishops and clergy felt the loss of an unerring guide and counsellor. The widow and the orphan lamented the absence of a protector and defender. The nation was plunged in an ocean of bitter grief and sorrow for "the Pearl of Ireland," "the Mother of Churches," "the Glory of Erin," "the chaste head of the Nuns of Eire," was taken from the midst of those who loved her with an affection akin to worship, and venerated the ground blessed by her footsteps. "She filled," says a French writer, "the hearts of her countrymen with a passionate devotion, such as no other mortal woman could inspire."

There was one consolation, however, left to her weeping and grief-laden children. Her soul had gone to enjoy the Beatific Vision, but the beautiful and graceful form that encased it in life still remained for their veneration, and was left them as a rich legacy to be treasured and guarded by those she had left behind to mourn her loss. Her sacred relics were not committed to the earth to be the food of worms and decay. A body that had been from infancy a chosen temple of the

Holy Ghost, could not be subjected to such desecration. They were reverently placed in a shrine of precious metal, adorned with gold and silver ornaments, and deposited on one side of the altar in her own Church of Kildare. The body of Saint Conlaeth, the first Bishop of Kildare, who died not many years before Saint Brigid, was buried on the other side of the altar in the same Church. It was meet that the bodies of the two Saints, who had built up, by their united efforts, the great Church and religious establishments in Kildare, should not be separated in death, but should remain together in the place their saintly lives and miracles made famous and hallowed for all time.

Soon after the relics of Saint Brigid had been deposited in their resting-place before the altar of God, where she had watched and prayed during her life, Catholic Ireland was rejoiced by accounts of the many miracles that had taken place there. Crowds from all parts of the Island were soon on their way to Kildare, either to obtain favours for themselves, or to verify, from personal observation, the truth of the statements that had reached them in their far-off homes. Those who came to place their faith and confidence in the intercessory power of the Patroness of Ireland went away rejoicing at the speedy answer they had obtained to their prayers, and the ample rewards given in return for their long and toilsome pilgrimage to her Shrine. The curious amongst the pilgrims, who came in a half-hearted, doubting spirit, to see for themselves whether the rumours of miraculous occurrences they had heard had any foundation in fact, were afforded evidence beyond yea or nay that Kildare was still the scene of the miraculous intervention of Saint Brigid. Yearly the number of pilgrims increased. A great fair was held on February 1st - Saint Brigid's Day. Kildare became one of the chief places of interest and pilgrimage in Ireland. The "Patrons" or "Patterns" of later days had their origin in the great convocations that gathered round the Shrines of

Saint Patrick and Brigid in the earlier centuries of our Church.

Cogitosus, a monk of Kildare, relates in his Life of Saint Brigid many miracles wrought through her intercession, of which he was an eye-witness. He lived in the eighth century. The following miracle is contained in the remarkable and detailed account of the wonders that happened at Kildare after the death of our Saint. A large monastery for men had been long established in the city of Saint Brigid. The Abbot was anxious to obtain a mill-stone of large dimensions to grind the corn for the use of his community, and the people in and around Kildare. He sent stone-cutters to the top of the Red Hills to find a suitable stone. They proceeded to look for it with great diligence. After great fatigue and labour they were rewarded by the discovery of an immense piece of rock, which they cut out and fashioned into a millstone. They then sent for the Abbot. He, with some of the brethren, came to the foot of the hill, with oxen and cars to convey it to the mill. But to their dismay they found the ascent too steep and rugged to permit the oxen to reach the top, where the mill-stone lay ready for transport. As there seemed no reasonable prospect of their being able to bring the stone down from its lofty and almost inaccessible resting-place, the majority seemed in favour of abandoning the stone the masons had laboriously worked into the requisite shape and size. The Abbot, nothing daunted by the difficulties of the situation, said he should have the stone down from the hill-top. He left the oxen behind, and with his brethren made the ascent to the spot where the masons were in charge of their handiwork. He addressed the masons in these words: "By no means abandon your efforts, but lift the mill-stone like men, and precipitate it from the top of this mountain, in the name and through the intercession of our most holy Brigid. For unless she, to whom nothing is impossible, according to what is said in Scripture, about all things being possible to

the believer, bear it to that place, whence the oxen shall be able to draw it, not any artifice or strength of man can bring this mill-stone over the rocky ground." The men, fired with faith and confidence by the words of the Abbot, rolled the stone down the rocky heights. They watched it in its whirling flight until it came to rest in the valley beneath. The spot of ground on which it finally rested was of a soft and boggy nature. There was no difficulty experienced in yoking the team of oxen to the stone and dragging it to its destination, where it was placed in position and served for long years the purpose for which it was procured.

Another remarkable fact in connexion with this mill-stone is also related, which adds to the miraculous occurrence just given. It suddenly ceased to perform its office when the corn of a certain magus, or magician, was brought to the mill for grinding. The miller was not aware of the profession of the owner of the grain. When the stone ceased working he put all the pressure at his disposal on the wheel to set the stone in motion, but all to no purpose. There was a current of water of more than usual force and volume running at the time, still there was no revolution of the stone. It was then discovered that the corn belonged to a magus and unbeliever. His corn was at once taken out and that of the monastery substituted in its place. To the astonishment of the onlookers the reluctant wheel immediately resumed its measured round, and the stone revolved as usual and ground the corn. This mill was burned to the ground; but in the midst of the debris the mill-stone was found whole and uninjured. It was reverently placed by the monks in a conspicuous place near their monastery. It became an object of veneration to the people of, and visitors to, Kildare, on account of the protection extended to it by the special intercession of Saint Brigid.

Kildare, up to the ninth century, was a city of great importance, enjoying many ecclesiastical privileges, and enriched with many substantial endowments. Soon after this date it suffered considerably from the ravages of war, rapine, fire and violence. Yet, in the midst of these evils, it continued to carry on the glorious traditions of its Saintly Foundress and Benefactress. Learning and sanctity still flourished. The nuns and the monks kept alive the lamp of Faith and learning confided to their care by Saint Brigid. The poor always found help and relief, the persecuted fled there for sanctuary, the widow and the orphan received a welcome, the young came to be instructed, though the stranger had seized forcibly the possessions of the monks and nuns, and strutted in triumph through the city streets. The children of Saint Brigid knew that her protecting hand was over them, and that those who had laid violent hands on this consecrated place, would not long enjoy their ill-gotten gain or brief authority. And thus it happened that the proud conqueror of today became the disgraced and conquered fugitive of tomorrow. "Notwithstanding the ravages of the Danes," says Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam, in his *Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars*, "we find the obits (deaths) of many of the Professors of the School of Kildare recorded in the Annals. We find also reference to the Chief Professor of Kildare Cosgrach, who died in A.D. 1041, and Cobthac, another Professor of Kildare, who died in A.D. 1069, celebrated for his universal knowledge of ecclesiastical discipline. In A.D. 1100 died Ferdomhach, the blind Professor of Kildare, who was eminently skilled in the Holy Scriptures." 6 After describing some of the terrible and violent onslaughts made on Kildare by organised bands of marauders, led by some irreligious and covetous prince or chieftain, the same learned writer adds: "Yet the holy line of Brigid's successors was still carried on - there was a Comorbana of Brigid who died in A.D. 1171." Bravely and consistently did the spiritual children of Saint Brigid carry on

the noble work for which their Foundress had established her great monastery on the plains of Kildare. Judging by the description given by Cogitosus, whom we have fully quoted in another place, of the dimensions and architectural design of the Church of Saint Brigid we can fully understand what a flourishing city Kildare must have been in the eighth century, in which he lived. The fame of its teaching and teachers attracted thousands of the youth of both sexes to this home of learning and sanctity. Many Saints began and ended their saintly lives within the walls of the monastic buildings, erected there in honour and under the patronage of Saint Brigid. The See of Kildare was ruled for centuries by men of learning and piety. Many of their names are to be found on the Calendar of Irish Saints. The great Manuscript known as the "Book of Leinster," was written by Finn MacGorman, who was Bishop of Kildare from A.D. 1148 to 1160. Dr. Healy, speaking of this Manuscript, says: "At present it consists of 177 loose leaves of vellum, which are preserved in Trinity College, and seven additional leaves of the same original, which belong to the Franciscans of the Irish province. No doubt, the entire work belonged to them originally, but was taken from them by force or fraud, and thus found its way to Trinity College. Its contents are of an exceedingly various and interesting character - heroic tales and poems, genealogies, calendars of the Saints, and various tracts used in the Irish Schools, dealing with both sacred and profane learning. Thus we see that through centuries of time and change, the lamp of faith and learning was trimmed and kept brightly burning through the devotion and self-sacrifice of numberless men and women, who embraced the religious life under the patronage and protection of the sweet 'Saint of the Lagenians.'"

The clergy and people of Kildare treasured for centuries after her death the relics of Saint Brigid with a tender and filial affection. The Danes plundered and sacked their city on

many occasions. Owing to the frequent and violent assaults made on Kildare and its inhabitants it was thought prudent to remove the remains of Saint Brigid to a more secure and sheltered resting-place. There can be no doubt that these fierce marauders would not have spared her shrine in their work of desecration. There was imminent danger, then, that the sacred relics of Saint Brigid might be destroyed during these frequent Danish invasions. It was decided that they should be removed, and at once, to a place of greater security and safety. The place selected was Down, in the North of Ireland Yet here they were not absolutely safe from the desecrating hands of the enemy. The town of Down, to which the body of the Saint was translated about the year 835, was subjected to frequent incursions and raids by these barbarian hordes. In fact, Down was sorely harassed and oppressed by the enemies of Ireland and her religion, down to the twelfth century. It was frequently given over to the devouring flames, kindled by the hands of these vandals. After a Conference of priests and people, it was decided to bury the remains in a place where they could not be easily discovered. The secret of the particular spot of earth where the body of Saint Brigid was interred was confided only to a few ecclesiastics of exemplary piety. In this way the precious treasure was preserved for the veneration of future generations. The secret must have died with those privileged to hold it. It is a remarkable fact that the tradition regarding the burial place of Saint Brigid passed out of the minds of the people of Down not many centuries after the transfer of her remains. What is still more astounding, the tradition concerning the burial in the same tomb of the three patrons of Ireland - Saint Patrick, Saint Brigid, and Saint Columba, was completely lost by the inhabitants.

But though Down had ceased to hold these holy traditions, it was fitting that their loss should be fully repaired by the prayers of a saintly Bishop of that See. Malachy occupied

the Bishopric of Down in the year 1185. King John had made his advent into Ireland in that year. Malachy had set his heart on discovering the exact burial ground of Ireland's greatest saints, and for this purpose had recourse to long and incessant prayer. His petition was granted in a marvellous manner. The late Canon O'Hanlon, in his Life of Saint Brigid, gives a detailed account of this occurrence: "While engaged in fervent prayer and within the Church of his Cathedral city, Malachy saw a ray of light like a sunbeam extending itself through the Church. Finally it settled over the graves of those inhumed Saints. The Bishop was exceedingly rejoiced at this vision, and he prayed more earnestly that the ray of light might remain until he had discovered the relics. Then rising and having procured the necessary implements, he went to the illuminated spot and dug beneath. In fine, he disinterred the bodies of the three Saints. The tomb or grave of Saint Patrick was fixed in a central cave or compartment, with the remains of Saint Brigid and Saint Columba on either side. He then withdrew those precious relics and placed them in three separate coffins. Afterwards he buried them in that same spot, which he took care to mark with great exactness. Malachy related the particulars of his vision to John De Courcey, the Governor of Down. This renowned warrior, being distinguished for his zeal in the cause of religion, concurred with the Bishop, that a message should be despatched to Rome with an humble supplication, addressed to the Sovereign Chief of the faithful - Urban III. His sanction for a solemn translation of those relics was requested. To this petition Pope Urban assented, and immediately despatched Vivian, Cardinal Priest of Saint Stephen, as his Legate to Ireland. The public translation of the relics took place on the 9th of June, 1186, the festival of Saint Columbkille. With all due reverence and great solemnity, those remains were removed from the place of their deposition to a more conspicuous position arranged for their reception within the

Cathedral Church." Here they reposed in peace and were pious objects of veneration down to that century, the sixteenth, which witnessed the demoniacal fury of Henry VIII against the Catholic religion and institutions in Ireland.

The undying shame of having desecrated the tombs and scattered the relics of Ireland's Patron Saints rests upon his evil memory. He was foiled providentially in his efforts to destroy completely the remains of the Saints and snatch from the hands of their



faithful Irish children the sacred memorials that even time and the Barbarians had spared. The head of Saint Brigid was secretly carried beyond his reach to Austria, where it was preserved at Neustadt, whence it was transferred to Lisbon in the year 1587. In the Church of Saint John the Baptist at Lumiar, near Lisbon, this precious relic is venerated in a side chapel dedicated to Saint Brigid. Her feast is celebrated yearly with fitting solemnity, and a special confraternity is instituted under her patronage. She is honoured as their Patroness by the farmers of the district. In the Church of Saint Martin at Cologne another relic of Saint Brigid is preserved. It is held in great veneration by the people, who make an annual pilgrimage to this shrine on the feast-day of the Saint, to give practical testimony to their love for the blessed memory of the Patroness of Ireland, and their confidence in her powerful intercession. The mantle of Saint Brigid is guarded with jealous care at Bruges in Belgium. A portion of this relic is preserved in the Convent of the Redemptoristines at Drumcondra, Dublin. In the Brigidine Convent of Ranwick, in Sydney, Australia, a relic of Saint Brigid is the happy possession of the nuns, who claim the saint as their spiritual mother and protectress. His Eminence

Cardinal Moran, Archbishop of Sydney, in a letter to the Rev. Mother, thus writes about the history of the relic: "Regarding the relic of Saint Brigid, you will find some reference to it, I think, in the little 'Life of the Saint' published by the Catholic Truth Society of Melbourne. I went all the way to Cologne on my return from Rome in 1884, on my appointment as Archbishop of Sydney, to secure a portion of the precious relic of Saint Brigid preserved there for over a thousand years. It is venerated at present in the Parochial Church of Saint Martin, to which in olden times was attached a famous Irish monastery, renowned for its learning and piety throughout all Germany in the early middle ages. In the special Lessons for Saint Brigid's Feast in the Breviary of Cologne mention is made of the relic as held in the greatest veneration from time immemorial, and frequented by pilgrims from all parts on the 1st February. The relic is, if I remember aright, a tooth of the Saint. At Cologne I found great difficulty in securing a portion of the relic. It was at first peremptorily refused. The Pastor of Saint Martin's declared that his parishioners would be at once in revolt if they heard that their great parochial treasure was being interfered with. I had then to invoke the aid of an influential Canon of the Cathedral of Cologne, whom I had assisted in some of his literary pursuits, and he set his heart on procuring the coveted relic. One of his arguments was somewhat amusing: It was the first time an Irish Archbishop of the remote See of Sydney had solicited a favour from Cologne. It was the new Christian world appealing to the old for a share of its sacred wealth. At all events our pleading was successful, and I bore away with me a portion of the bone, duly authenticated, which is now the privilege of your good Sisters to guard and venerate. I hope that Saint Brigid may, by her intercession, obtain for her Australian communities some share of the zeal and holiness which were so characteristic of her nuns in the olden times."

The history of Saint Brigid would be incomplete without reference being made to the Holy Fire with which her name is connected. It was commonly called the "inextinguishable fire of Saint Brigid." This name was given to it, not because it could not be quenched or extinguished but solely for the reason that it was kept lighting night and day by the nuns and holy women, who kept it alive by a constant supply of fuel. Giraldus Camhrensis, who wrote in the twelfth century, thus speaks of it: "At Kildare, which the glorious Brigid renders illustrious, are many miracles worthy of notice, and the first that occurs is 'Brigid's Fire,' called the unquenchable fire, not that it cannot be put out, but because the nuns and religious women are so careful and diligent in supplying and recruiting it with fuel, that from the time of that virgin, it hath remained always unextinguished through so many succession of years; and although in such a length of years so vast a quantity of wood hath been consumed, yet the ashes have never increased." Many miracles are related of the punishment, swift and dreadful, that befell those who had the temerity to interfere with this fire with the intention of extinguishing it, or lessening its intensity and brightness.

The learned Archbishop of Tuam, in his work, more than once quoted in these pages, inclines to the opinion that this fire was kept burning before the tomb of Saint Brigid. "Can it be," he asks, "that the Kildare nuns anticipated this general, and now obligatory, rule of keeping a perpetual lamp before the Blessed Sacrament? Or was it a sacred fire that was kept always burning before the tomb of their holy Foundress? In all probability the perpetual fire of Kildare was for the purpose of keeping the lamps lit before the shrines of its holy Foundress. Many accidents might lead to the lamp itself being extinguished, but the sacred fire, night and day, under the sedulous care of Saint Brigid's daughters, might be cherished 'through long ages of darkness and storm,' if

not extinguished by the Danes, or reformers like Henry de Loundres. This latter was a Norman Bishop who came to Ireland in A.D. 1220, He mistakenly thought that it savoured of Paganism or superstition. He ordered the fire to be extinguished He would never have done so had he enquired into the origin and object of this pious practice. Like many others of his countrymen, who occupied high Sees, he never understood the usages of the country, or the highly emotional and deeply religious character of its people. Notwithstanding his edict, the fire was lit again by order of the Bishop of Kildare, and continued to burn brightly in spite of all the trouble of the times down to the total suppression of the monasteries by Queen Elizabeth."

A curious story is related by Giraldus Cambrensis as having been in vogue amongst the people of Kildare in the century in which he lived and wrote. A falcon was accustomed to take its rest on the top of the Round Tower, the only remnant today of Kildare's former ecclesiastical greatness. It was said that this bird had been seen ever since the days of Saint Brigid, circling round the tower and resting when weary on its summit. In the presence of some soldiers and civilians this bird was seen chasing some wild birds and water fowl over the plain of Kildare. It had been trained to this sport long years before. No rival would this strange bird allow to perch on, or remain about Kildare Church.

The inhabitants had a great awe and veneration for the bird, which they called "Saint Brigid's Falcon". It was usual for it at breeding time to wing its flight to the mountains of Glendalough. After the usual interval it returned and took up its old position as sentinel and guardian over the ecclesiastical buildings of Kildare. It was killed by a rustic in a cowardly fashion by a blow of a stick at a moment when the bird was stretching forward to receive food from his hand.

"According to several prophecies relating to Saint Brigid," says the late Canon O'Hanlon, "her name and her virtues were destined to be celebrated, not only in Ireland, but throughout the world, while that veneration and respect paid to her memory were to continue until the day of final doom. The event has corresponded hitherto with this recorded prediction, nor can we reasonably doubt the prophetic saying will continue to be verified, when time draws to its close, for numberless writers have testified concerning the extent and prevalence of those honours paid to her throughout Ireland, as also in the various countries of Europe, and over the entire world. Generations yet unborn shall continue still further to extend and perpetuate her fame."

Protestant writers have added their testimony to that of the reverend author just quoted His Eminence Cardinal Moran in his life of the Saint gives an extract from the work of a Protestant dignitary, entitled *St. Brigid and the See of Kildare*, in which the writer thus testifies to the veneration in which the name of Saint Brigid was held at home and abroad: "Extraordinary veneration for the name of Brigid was displayed by the Irish in the Middle Ages. One writer says that 'the Scots, the Picts, the Irish, and those who live near them, the English, put her next after the Virgin Mother of God.' It is said that her Feast was celebrated in every Cathedral Church from the Grisons to the German Sea for nearly a thousand years." The "Book of Leinster" gives a list of some thirty religious houses of women who were under her obedience in ancient times. In Ireland her name is commemorated in churches, convents, streets, hospitals, and wells. In the Ordnance Survey of Irish townlands, there were thirty-six Kilbrides. In Australia and America, wherever the Irish people are, churches, schools and convents bear her name, no diocese without one at least in some several, as in the diocese of Boston, four churches. On the continent,

wherever the Irish people have set foot - at Amiens, Tours, Saint O'Mer, Besancon, Aix-la-Chapelle, Cologne, Fulda, Namur, Seville, and Lisbon - her name has been honoured.

Mrs. Atkinson brings her beautiful Life of Saint Brigid to a conclusion in the following eloquent and poetic sentences: "And now in regions unreached by the swift-winged inspiration of the ancient race - in the New World of the West, beyond the Atlantic billows, and in the New World of the South, seated in Pacific waters - the 'Sea-divided Gael' still hold with inviolable fidelity the guardianship of her name and fame. Brigid has a niche in their churches; Brigid has a seat by their hearth. In the heart of the Irish, at home and in exile, an echo of Saint Brogan's hymn resounds:

There are two Virgins in Heaven
Who will not give me a forgetful protection -
Mary and Saint Brigid.
Under the protection of both may we remain."

Great and extended is the honour paid to Saint Brigid on earth. The influence of her protection is still felt throughout this dear land of ours. In dark and dreadful days she infused courage into the hearts of her children to suffer and if necessary yield up their lives for the Faith of which she was the illustrious exponent. She guards the virtue of Ireland's daughters, so that they have gained an enviable and unique name for purity of heart and modesty of demeanour throughout the civilized world. The prayer that wells up from an Irish heart to her shall never go unheeded. The power of her intercession has not lessened with the years, nor has her maternal interest in the spiritual welfare of her race diminished or grown cold and indifferent. Saint Brigid is still our beloved Patroness; we are still her children. It behooves us to place a filial and loving confidence in her intercessory powers. Let us lift our eyes towards heaven and behold her

as one of her saintly biographers of days long since perished has depicted her for us in the enjoyment of her heavenly reward: "Her soul is like the sun, in the heavenly kingdom, amid the choirs of angels and archangels, and though great is the honour shown her on earth, yet immeasurably greater shall it be when she shall shine like a lamp of lightness in the full perfection of body and soul in the assembly on the Judgment Day, in the society of the cherubim and seraphim, in the society of the Son of the Virgin Mary, and in the presence of the Most Noble of all, the Holy Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

A Retrospect

Awake I arise I shake off thy dreams,
Thou art not what thou wert of yore:
Of all those rich, those dazzling
beams,
That once illum'd thine aspect o'er,
Show me a solitary one
Whose glory is not quenched and
gone.

- *Mangan*



The Order of Saint Brigid has now completed a century of glorious achievements for the Church of God in Ireland. To form an estimate of the work accomplished by these devoted daughters of Saint Brigid, it is necessary to recall the deplorable and backward state to which at the time of their institution, Irish Catholics were reduced, owing to circumstances beyond their control. Poverty the people suffered without a murmur; persecution of a most relentless type they could endure; but the deprivation of the means to secure for themselves and their children religious instruction and liberal education was the blow they felt most keenly of all. The adherents of the old faith were deprived of all the educational advantages enjoyed to the fullest extent by their Protestant fellow-countrymen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Those who wished to be educated had to become exiles and learn on the continent what was forbidden under severest penalties at home.

It was only five decades before the opening of the nineteenth century that Catholic chapels were allowed to be opened for public worship. The Catholic schoolmaster forty

years later had the brand of the outlaw removed from his profession. These small crumbs that fell from the richly-laden tables of our oppressors were something to be grateful for. No Catholic could hold an office of trust, profit, or influence. They were obliged to pay out of their poverty excessive tithes to an alien Church, and exorbitant taxes to the landlords, their cruel and pitiless task-masters. The social status of the Catholics as a body was completely and insolently ignored by the dominant classes. Every insult that could be heaped upon them was thrown at them with all the virulence of bitter and deep-seated hatred for the religion they professed. When any attempt was made by the educated amongst them to better the condition of their less fortunate brethren, a howl of condemnation and reproach was the inevitable answer to their just and equitable demands. Needless to say Irish Catholics of that sorrow-laden period of our history were sunk in a veritable ocean of despondency, bordering on despair. The recollection of the Penal Laws brought a cold shudder to their frame and a fountain of tears to their eyes. They were bond-slaves pure and simple, tied to the chariot-wheels of cruel and heartless masters, who hated them not so much because of their devotion to their native Ireland as for their inalienable and loyal allegiance to the Faith of their Fathers. Had they been willing to barter this divine gift for the so-called religion of their oppressors, the chains which bound them would have been stricken off, and social and political freedom been their reward. The insignificant few, who renounced the ancient Faith for the new religion, were received with open arms by the heads of the Protestant Church, and had every worldly honour and comfort bestowed upon them. Yet, notwithstanding these inducements, the people clung with greater tenacity to the Faith for which their forefathers lived and died. Every means known to the ingenuity of man was employed to make converts to the Protestant Church. Money was expended in fabulous sums to bribe the poor, calumnies

against the Catholic Church were uttered by men occupying high and responsible positions in Church and State to undermine the faith of the weak and uninstructed, and the ministrations of the priests were hampered and circumscribed by iniquitous legislation so as to keep them from administering, and their flocks from receiving, those blessed aids by which the Catholic Church sustains and fortifies her children in days of temptation and persecution. In the history of the nations, a parallel to the treatment of Ireland under the Penal Laws enacted by a Government making profession of Christianity is nowhere to be found except in the days of Nero, the Imperial buffoon. For three hundred years did Ireland wear her crown of thorns with a resignation and submission almost superhuman. The long night of suffering seemed now to be drawing to a close; the dawn was waking the new-born day of a more tolerant spirit in the hearts of her rulers, and of a greater latitude to the Irish Church to fulfill her divine mission amongst her persecuted children. Yet the shadow of the horrors of the penal days still hung thickly over the land. The Church had to renew her life and regain some of the former strength and vitality characteristic of her before her persecutors had put her on the rack of fiendish torture.

Ireland can never forget the invaluable services rendered to the Catholic Church, then emerging from the Catacombs of her centuries of persecution, by that intellectual giant, J. K. L., James Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, a member of the Order of Saint Augustine, and the Irish Tribune, Daniel O'Connell, whose labours on behalf of the Catholic Church are written in letters of gold across the pages of our eventful history. O'Connell describes this illustrious occupant of the See, founded by Saint Brigid, in these glowing terms: "Of all the intellects I have ever encountered, that of Dr. Doyle was the most mighty and stupendous, while his manly gentle manners formed a fine contrast to the towering strength of

his intellect and illustrated the idea of the thunderbolts of Jove in the hands of a child."

This great Augustinian Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin gives us a detailed account of the sad condition of affairs in Ireland in the year 1808. He refers in scathing terms to the Penal Laws under which Ireland was governed - or rather misgoverned - for close on three centuries. "I have read," he writes, "of the persecutions by Nero, Domitian, Genseric, and Attila, as well as the barbarities of the sixteenth century. I have compared them with those inflicted on my own country, and I protest to God that the latter, in my opinion, have exceeded in duration, extent and intensity all that have ever been endured by mankind for justice sake. These Catholics are now emerging from this persecution, and like the Trojans who had escaped with their household gods to the shores of the Adriatic, or the Jews after returning from captivity, they are employed with one hand defending themselves against the aggressions of their implacable enemies, and with the other cleansing the holy places, rebuilding the sanctuary, making new vessels for the sacrifice, and worshipping most devoutly at their half-raised altars. The recollection of their past sufferings is far from being effaced. The comparative freedom they enjoy is a relaxation of pressure rather than a rightful possession. As religionists they are suffered to exist, and the law restrains the persecutor, but persecutes them of itself. They are obliged to sweat and toil for those very ministers of another religion who contributed to forge their chains. Their hay and corn, their fleeces and lambs, with the roots on which they feed, they are still compelled to offer at an altar which they deem profane. They still are bound to rebuild and ornament



their own former parish church and spire, that they may stand in the midst of them as records of the right of conquest, or of the triumph of law over equity and the public good They will have to attend the bailiff when he calls with the warrant of the Churchwardens to collect their last shilling (if one should happen to remain), that the empty church may have a stove, the clerk a surplice, the Communion-table elements to be sanctified, though, perhaps, there be none to partake of them. Such is their condition, while some half-thatched cabin or unfurnished house collects them on Sundays to render thanks to God for even these blessings and to tell their woes to Heaven."

In his *Letters on the State of Ireland*, he writes: "How often have I perceived in a congregation of some thousands of persons, how the very mention of the Penal Code caused every eye to glisten and every ear to stand erect; the very trumpet of the Last Judgment if sounded would not produce a more perfect stillness in any assemblage of Irish peasantry than a strong allusion to the wrongs we suffer."

We who happily live in these days, enjoying the comforts of our stately churches and magnificent cathedrals, can hardly realise the inconveniences and hardships endured by our forefathers in the fulfilment of their religious duties. Kneeling, perhaps, on the damp floor of a cabin, or on the sod of some lonely secluded valley - a guard being placed on the neighbouring hill-top to give warning of the approach of the soldiery - they heard Mass on Sundays and Holidays, the canopy of heaven the only roof over a deeply pious and reverent congregation. Owing to the scarcity of priests, many a long mile over mountain and plain and bog-land they wended their way to be present at the Sacrifice of the Mass. To their undying honour be it said, they proved themselves worthy children of their martyred sires, who laid down their lives in defence of their faith, and in testimony of

its divine origin. Many a tale is told of the dreadful condition of the so-called churches. In one of them in the town of Callan the roof collapsed during the celebration of Mass. The congregation held up the tottering roof until the priest had concluded the divine mysteries.

The Catholics of those days had a colossal task before them. They had to build up almost from the very foundations the Church which Saint Patrick and Saint Brigid had left in a flourishing and prosperous condition. They had to reconstruct their churches (any left them, for the best had been appropriated by their enemies), their monasteries, their schools, and strive to re-establish in Ireland some of her ancient ecclesiastical splendour. They put their hand to the plough, and did not look back. Little by little, church spires rose in the valleys and on the holy hills of Eire. Convents for men and women were erected. Bishops and priests increased in numbers. The Catholic Church was assuming her holiday attire and regaining a measure of her former greatness and glory.

If the provisions for public worship were in a dreadfully backward state, what is to be said for the means provided for the education of the young in those days. The late Dr. MacHale, familiarly known as "John of Tuam," the saintly Archbishop of the Western province, thus graphically describes before a Royal Commission the school-house of his early days: "The school in which I was brought up had been planned by the Author of the Universe and fashioned by Nature. Its hall was most majestic, its dimensions magnificent. The blue vault of Heaven was its canopy, and the desk on which I essayed to write the bosom of my mother earth, and her lap the seat on which I reclined." The hedge-school endeavoured to supply the want of more suitable and efficient institutions which the law of the land proscribed under heavy pains and penalties. The people

were so impoverished that they could not erect proper school accommodation, and even if they could the landlords of the soil would not give them the ground.

A Protestant historian - the late Mr. Lecky pays this well-deserved tribute to the hedge-schools and their masters, who, under difficulties the most trying and with a price on their heads, kept the lamp of learning brightly burning throughout the land. "The passion for knowledge," says Mr. Lecky, "amongst the Irish poor is extremely strong, and the zeal with which they maintained their hedge-schools under the pressure of abject poverty, and in the face of the prohibition of the Penal Laws, is one of the honourable features in their history. The masters were housed in the hovels of the poor, and protected from the vigilant eyes and eager grasp of the minions of the law who hunted them as they would some beasts of prey. They collected the children round them and fed them with the intellectual food they had gathered and stored up in their own minds knowledge derived from teachers and the few books that came their way. Noble and true-hearted Irishmen, your country has raised a monument to your memories in the inmost recesses of her grateful heart."

But while education was denied the children of Catholic parents, every provision was made, in all branches of learning, for the favoured minority. Funds, more than ample for their requirements, were placed at their disposal. The Catholics were taxed to the last farthing for the up-keep and maintenance of Protestant churches and schools. At last the injustice of this taxation dawned upon the sluggish brain of the English Government. Something must be done for the Catholics. Here is the way in which the poor Catholic parents and children were treated in the sacred name of justice and equity. The Kildare Street School system was established ostensibly for the education of the poor Catholics. The

ultimate aim of this institution - the proselytising of Irish children - soon became apparent. The powerful voice of Dr. Doyle, in unison with that of his lion-hearted episcopal colleague, Dr. MacHale, was raised in protest against this iniquitous system. From these champions of the people it received its death-blow. The primary object of these schools is apparent from the words used by the Protestant Bishop Bonner: "The number of Papists in the Kingdom is so great that it is of the utmost consequence to Protestant interests here to bring them over by all Christian methods." The Christian methods alluded to consisted of bribes of food, money and clothing, to the parents of the ill-fed and scantily-clad children, "The Charter Schools", "The Endowed Schools", "The Blue Coat Schools" were founded all for the same iniquitous purpose, to induce the Catholics of Ireland, by bribes and promises of reward, to abandon the old religion for the new. This avowed object is plainly set forth by one of the promoters of these bogus educational establishments. "They are founded for the purpose of rescuing the souls of the poor children from the dangers of Popish superstition, and their bodies from the miseries of idleness and beggary." But their efforts were in vain. Their bribes were left untouched by Catholic hands and their school-houses unfrequented by those for whom they were intended.

A new soul was being infused into the limp and prostrate body of Catholic Ireland. The blood was coursing through her veins with renewed warmth and vigour. Dr. Doyle and O'Connell bade her look her enemies in the face and demand her just rights from her rulers. The Catholic religion was professed by the vast majority of the people. The Church would no longer hide herself in the Catacombs. Her churches must be built, her schools erected, her nuns and monks take possession of their convents, her bishops and priests must have full and free exercise of their sacred office.

These were the demands voiced for her by the champions of her cause - Dr. Doyle and O'Connell. They saw the necessity of standing up to their enemies and throwing aside the apologetic and half-hearted remonstrances of the Penal Days. The words of Dr. Doyle and O'Connell sounded a call to arms to the Catholics of Ireland. Noble and vigorous was the response. England felt she had not now before her the shattered frame and the broken spirit of Ireland of the days of persecution. A nation, pulsating with renewed life and vigour, stood at her gates to demand equality of treatment in Government and religion with the followers of the State Church, and would not be denied. At last England saw the folly and danger of delay in conceding the just rights of the people, and gradually expanded her legislation in favour of a nation that nothing could move from her Catholicity.

The need for pious men and women to take charge of the young and impart to them a sound religious education was felt on all sides. The bishops and priests realised how backward, not only the young, but also their elders were in the knowledge of the principles and in the practice of their Faith. The opportunities afforded them to gain this all-important knowledge were not many. No blame, therefore, could be attached to them. Now was the time to take the people in hand and save them from the proselytisers. The necessity arose for the establishment of an Order, such as that of the daughters of Saint Brigid, who would take up the work to which their spiritual mother had devoted her life. The harvest was ripe for the sickle, and the reapers, the nuns of Saint Brigid, were brought in by a saintly bishop to cut it down and place its golden sheaves in the store-house of the Irish Church.

The Founder of the Brigidines

And whatsoe'r the years may bring, however fortune range,
Yet firmer, fonder, shall be knit, through every chance and
change.

The sacred ties which Heaven itself with tender care hath
wove

To bind to Mother Ireland the Soggarth of her love.

- *Father P M Furlong*

The Order of Brigidines was appropriately founded in Leinster, the native province of the Patroness of Ireland, by a worthy successor of the first Bishop of Kildare - Saint Conlaeth. It was brought into existence to perpetuate the memory and continue the work of that noble band of women who, under the leadership and direction of Saint Brigid, achieved such wonderful spiritual results for the early Church in Ireland. The labours of Saint Patrick would not have borne such a plentiful and lasting harvest had not Brigid and her nuns given to the Apostle their invaluable services in the sacred cause of religion. Saint Brigid left behind her a deeply devoted congregation of pious virgins to carry on the work she had so signally and successfully accomplished in life. When these were called to their reward, others equally zealous filled their places and handed on to their successors the glorious traditions of their Order. Down to the sixteenth century they lived and worked for the people of Ireland. They instructed the young, they helped the poor, and proved themselves worthy children of their holy foundress. Convents under the patronage of Saint Brigid were to be found in every important centre of Ireland, as well as in the most remote parts of the country. The people, who had experienced the benefit of their administrations, "rose up and blessed them."

A change of a most drastic character came over the fair face of Catholic Ireland in the sixteenth century, as students of our history well know. The convents were torn down, the sanctuaries of learning and piety were desecrated, and the friends of the poor and the needy, and the instructors of the young, were forced to abandon their peaceful cloisters, and seek a refuge and a home amongst strangers. They were hunted like wild beasts by the persecutors of their Faith and race. "With desolation was the land made desolate," when the brutal soldiery of England set themselves to execute the orders of their still more brutal Sovereigns, Henry VIII and Elizabeth. The Church and her consecrated priests and virgins were made the target for the poisoned shafts of monarchs, whose lives disgraced the diadems they wore, and whose hatred of the Catholic Faith was the outcome of diabolical inspiration. The banishment by law of the priest and the nun from Ireland failed in its object, the total extinction of Christ's ministers and spouses in the land of the Gael. The priest and the nun are with us again in ever-increasing numbers, and have proved themselves not less worthy of the love and affection of the Irish Catholics than those who lived in the days of old. May they long remain with us, in the undisturbed enjoyment of their cloistered homes and the peaceful exercise of their sacred calling, is the heart-felt prayer of Erin's sons and daughters the world over.

The founder of the nuns of Saint Brigid, or Brigidines, was Dr. Daniel Delaney, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. He was born in the year A.D. 1747, at Paddock, near Mountrath, His parents belonged to the respectable and wealthy farming class. He was a boy of uncommon quickness and cheerfulness. It was apparent to his parents and teachers that he was destined to serve God in the Sanctuary, and that the world and its seductive allurements and promises of reward had no attractions for him. When he had attained his

sixteenth year, he was sent to Saint Omers, in France, to prepare himself for the ecclesiastical state. From this famous College he passed to one still more famous, "the College of the Community" in Paris. He gained the highest distinctions in this centre of learning that it was in its power to confer. His professors foresaw the brilliant future that lay in wait for their Irish student.



As the time for his ordination approached he gave greater proofs of his intellectual and moral powers by the brilliancy of his answers at the examinations, and the edifying character of his student life. In due time he received the dignity of priesthood. He did not immediately return to Ireland, but remained attached to one of the teaching staffs of the great Colleges of Paris. When he had reached his thirtieth year he came to Ireland to commence his missionary career, under the paternal care of Dr. O'Keeffe, Bishop of his native diocese. A beautiful pen-picture of this remarkable ecclesiastic is contained in a manuscript written by the brilliant pen of Dr. Doyle, O.S.A., who was destined to occupy the See of Kildare, not many years after Dr. Delaney's demise. "Dr. Delaney," writes Dr. Doyle, "was a person gifted with rare adornments. His person was dignified and engaging, his talents brilliant, his compositions in verse and prose spirited, and abounding in the most luxuriant, but chaste imagery. His powers of conversation were unrivalled: wit, satire, elegance of diction, and illustrations of the most varied kind, flowed from his lips; he was the delight of all who approached him; the kindness and tenderness of his heart caused him often to be too indulgent to others, he imposed restraints only on himself. He was most happy at all times in evolving the most solid, religious reflections with

gaiety and vivacity of thought and language, and was one of the few men who never failed to employ such talents and dispositions as he possessed to render virtue attractive and vice abhorred." A priest esteemed worthy of such a beautiful panegyric could not possibly fail to attain the highest honours in the gift of the Church. He could not, it is evident, be other than a tower of strength to his people and a father to his flock. His Bishop had a welcome for him when he returned to Ireland in 1777. He appointed him his own curate in the town of Tullow, then the residence of the Bishops of Kildare and Leighlin. Here the energetic curate found more than ample scope for the exercise of his apostolic zeal. Tullow at that time was by no means the model Catholic town it is happily today. Its moral state is described in anything but flattering terms by writers of the period. On account of the lack of the means of education, not only the young, but even their elders, were ignorant of the principles of their faith and their ordinary obligations as Catholics. The emissaries of the Bible Societies had made Tullow their headquarters, and were using all the means at their disposal to attract the young to their schools and their seniors to their conventicles. In these latter, the vilest slanders were uttered against the Church of Rome, and her ministers were held up to derision and ridicule. The observance of Sunday was neglected by a large number of Catholics, who for want of proper instruction, were blameless for their ignorance of the solemn duties that day entails on all children of the Church. To this absence of Sunday observance was added another grievance which tortured the very soul of Dr. Delaney, the devoted minister of God's Church. Public games were held on Sundays, and were accompanied by excessive drinking, unseemly brawls, and other evil practices. The priest, responsible for the souls of his flock, had here a herculean task set him in the first years of his sacred ministry. Nothing daunted, Dr. Delaney set himself to remedy this sad and deplorable condition of

affairs in his parish. He made a beginning with the children. He had a winning way with them, and therefore had no difficulty in attracting them to his classes of religious instruction. There was nothing austere or repulsive in his character. In imitation of his Divine Master he became himself a child to gain their hearts and win them over to ways of innocence and virtue. His heart was in the right place, his love for his flock disinterested, and his kindly Irish face beamed with good nature and hospitality. The ready and quick-witted perception of the Celt was not slow to perceive and appreciate such loving traits in the character of their "Soggarth Aroon." But Dr. Delaney's hands were, to a certain extent, tied, and the limits of his zeal circumscribed, for he was not absolute master of this vineyard of the Lord. He had to act under the guidance and by the permission of his spiritual head, the Bishop (Dr. O'Keeffe), who could not always see eye to eye with the young cleric serving under him, or enter into his plans for the spiritual elevation of the fold committed to their care.

When Dr. O'Reilly, the Parish Priest of Kilcock and Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese, was translated to the Archbishopric of Armagh, Dr. Delaney was appointed to fill his place. The popular curate of Tullow was consecrated Bishop-Coadjutor in the year A.D. 1783. The zeal that characterised his ministrations as Curate was intensified and redoubled during the years of his Episcopacy. He had now a larger sphere in which to exercise his apostolic energy, and a free hand for accomplishing the good works upon which he had set his heart. The Episcopal portion of his life is admirably set before us in a manuscript written by the versatile and powerful pen of Dr. Doyle, O.S.A., the light and glory of Kildare and Leighlin: "During his administration the circumstances of the Catholics improved through the relaxation of the Penal Laws, and with unwearied zeal this Bishop, aided by diem, laboured successfully to rebuild

chapels, to increase the number of clergy, and to promote religious instruction by means of schools, confraternities, and the circulation of good works. He held in his hand, as it were, the hearts of his flock, and moulded them as he pleased, or rather as God required him to do. His labours were unceasing and an ardent love of God, with tenderness and compassion for sinners, seemed to be the characteristic virtues of his life. Saint Francis de Sales was the great model of his private and episcopal labours, and like him he became the instrument whereby the Almighty wrought numerous conversions, as well from heresy as from vice. His habits were frugal, his demeanour condescending; humbly he made himself all to all that he might gain all to Christ. He died at Tullow, after enduring a long and painful illness, and is interred in the chapel of that town, which he himself had raised from the foundation."

The two Churches of Tullow and Mountrath stand today proud witnesses to the zeal and worth of the good Bishop who erected them. He wished his people to be provided with the best temples of prayer that architectural skill could design. He furnished them with everything necessary for the greater and more imposing fulfilment of the Church ritual. He, out of his slender means, presented the Church of Tullow with sacred vessels of massive silver, not only chalices and ciboriums, but even lamp and thurible. When we consider the times in which these works for the glory of God were undertaken, the poverty of the people, the difficulty of obtaining suitable sites for churches and religious institutions, we must form a high estimate of this great prelate who accomplished so much for the flock of which he was chief pastor. The memory of such men as he will never perish as long as true Catholic hearts beat in Irish breasts.

The town of Tullow owes his memory a debt of gratitude, among many others, for having established there the

beautiful and salutary devotion of the Procession and Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament on the Feast and during the octave of Corpus Christi. In the days in which he lived there were necessarily many obstacles, unknown in our times, to be overcome before any great movement for the spiritual improvement of the people could be solidly established. To begin with, the people had to be instructed thoroughly in the meaning and utility of the devotion, and the aims and objects of the pious Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, the good Pastor established in the parish. A people so long accustomed to a certain ease and freedom in their religious practices and devotions, had to be worked up to an enthusiasm and fervour necessary to ensure the success and permanency of the new movement. The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in a short time attained a membership of thousands of both sexes. It was an inspiring and edifying spectacle to see the merchant and his employees, the master and servant, the wife and maid, the old and young, taking their turn before the altar of God during the solemn days of Exposition. The Bishop gave the example, for he was the shepherd leading his flock into the delicious pastures provided for the spiritual refreshment of man in this Adorable Mystery of God's infinite love and compassion for His creatures.

The Rebellion of 1798 interrupted these devotions. As soon as peace had been restored to our land after this memorable, but fruitless attempt of a down-trodden people to shake off the galling yoke of unparalleled oppression, the Processions and the Adoration, night and day, during the octave of Corpus Christi, were resumed. The new church was completed in 1805. A fitting temple was erected wherein the Blessed Sacrament might find a throne from which all graces would flow in copious streams to the adorers who lisped their prayers and brought their petitions to the feet of their hidden God. The Processions formed one of the leading

features in the celebration of the great Feast of Corpus Christi. People came from far and near to witness the inspiring ceremony, and to pay their humble tribute of love and thanksgiving to their Lord, concealed under the Sacramental Veil. The saintly Bishop carried on all occasions the Blessed Sacrament on these days of solemn praise and adoration; no matter what else might claim his attention in any part of his vast diocese, he made it a point of honour to be present in Tullow on Procession days. He was not content with one Procession on the Feast itself; on the Sunday within the octave and on the octave day a Procession took place.

The days on earth of this good prelate were now about to end. He had long suffered from a tedious and painful malady. While thus enduring the torture of intense bodily pain, he carried the Blessed Sacrament on his beloved Procession day. The effort undoubtedly hastened his death. He was called to his reward while Mass was being celebrated in the present Community room of Tullow Convent. The clergy, the monks and the nuns, whose spiritual father he was, witnessed the passing away of one of the most faithful and zealous Bishops that ever occupied the throne, or held the crozier of Saint Conlaeth. He died on the 9th of July, 1814, in the sixty-seventh year of his age and thirty-first of his Episcopate.

Tullow, The Mother House

Our Mother-house, the famed,
the fair,
The golden house of light and
intellect.

- *Mangan*



The Mother House of the Order of Saint Brigid is located in the ancient and historic town of Tullow, County Carlow. Tullow is an important and thriving town, pleasantly and picturesquely reposing on the banks of the river Slaney. A bridge of five arches, dating back to the year 1767, spans the river, and by reason of its antiquity and solidity attracts the attention of the visitor. The town is said to have been an appendage to a castle built there by the early English settlers under the direction of Hugh De Lacy. It came in the course of time into the possession of the Earl of Ormonde. Colonel Butler, a member of that family, in 1650, made a gallant but unsuccessful stand against the Parliamentary forces under the command of Colonels Hewson and Reynolds. No vestige of this once formidable stronghold remains to tell of its ancient glories, and to mark the site of what was once the chief pride and mainstay of Tullow and its inhabitants.

As far back as the year 1315 an Augustinian Monastery was founded in Tullow by Hugh Tallon and Simon Lombard. The grant made by these good men to the sons of Saint Augustine received the royal sanction in the reign of Edward III - 1331. The establishment of this Monastery of Augustinians in the town had the effect of attracting many to make their home there, and helped considerably to raise

it to a position of importance it could otherwise never have obtained. The foundation of a religious community in any centre of population, however small, was sure to bring with it material prosperity and an influx of desirable inhabitants, ready and willing to throw in their lot with the people and help to develop its industrial resources. Here they would find every opportunity for the practice of their religion, which they valued beyond every other consideration. Their children would have the advantage of receiving a sound religious education to fit them for the battle of life. Inducements such as these contributed even more than the mighty protection and patronage of the Lords of the Manor to swell the population of the town and promote its industrial and commercial welfare. The inhabitants of Tullow will always remember with pride and gratitude that the sons of Saint Augustine had no small share in establishing and building up the place of their birth and affection.

Time has dealt harshly with the Augustinian Monastery of former days. Hardly a trace of it now remains except a broken stone cross in the burial ground on the south side of the river. The castle was turned to a purpose little dreamt of by its former proud and haughty masters. In the reign of Queen Anne it was taken down and its massive stones utilized to build a military barrack. This structure was on the site now occupied by the courthouse. In this prosperous and picturesque town the Brigidines unobtrusively, yet effectively, carry out the great mission of love and charity confided to their keeping by their founder, Dr. Delaney.

The people of Tullow were hard-working and industrious, yet, withal, they found it hard to keep body and soul together. They had rejected, with scorn, the many inducements and bribes held out to them by the Ascendancy party to renounce the faith of their fathers and conform to the State religion. Whilst manfully resisting the allurements of the

false creed of the Saxon they were lamentably ignorant of the sublime lessons inculcated by their own. In the days of their youth they were deprived of the incalculable advantage of religious instruction, the Sunday Mass, the powerful aid of the Sacraments, and the watchful pastoral care of their Priests. They had lived under the ban of the Penal Laws, and experienced still the effects of the persecution that overshadowed and darkened the early days of their lives. A harsh word could not be uttered against them if ignorance of the principles of their Faith and practices, and a want of observance and enthusiasm regarding it were found to exist in Tullow as elsewhere throughout Ireland in those days. The advent of Dr. Delaney to Tullow was the harbinger of brighter and happier days for the inhabitants of Tullow. The formation of the Sunday School was the first step taken by him in the scheme of reformation, planned and elaborated by him after much thought and prayer. He began with the younger generation. The little ones flocked to the Parish Church on Sunday mornings. It must have been an edifying spectacle, and one most gratifying to the heart of the zealous pastor, to see crowds of children, neatly and cleanly attired, wending their way at an early hour to the Church to receive instruction from their spiritual father and best of friends. When the children had taken their places in the church, at a given signal they went on their knees and, with clear and resonant voices, sang the "O Salutaris Hostia" in praise and honour of Him who said "Suffer little children to come unto Me." Their beloved pastor had formed a village choir and trained the young voices to sing appropriate hymns at their Sunday classes. No magnificent organ accompanied their tuneful voices in the singing of the hymns. The natural and inherent taste of the Celt for music was exemplified in this choir of children, whose rendering of the praises of God were sweeter and dearer to the blessed object of them than the organised and well-trained voices that vibrate and wake the echoes in

the aisles of great cathedrals. The words of the Christian poet, Keble, seem fittingly to describe the scene witnessed in Tullow Parish Church on Sunday mornings:

"Child-like though the voices be
And untuneful be the parts,
Thou wilt own the minstrelsy
If it flows from child-like hearts."

Having sung the "O Salutaris Hostia," the children and their teachers sang "Veni Creator Spiritus" for light and grace to receive and profit by the instructions. Morning prayers and a short meditation then followed. The instructions lasted until noon, when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered. At two o'clock the children again assembled in the church for further instruction and the singing of hymns. Vespers were said in the afternoon at four o'clock. The children having spent the Sunday in this edifying manner were encouraged in all their youthful and useful amusements by their pastor. He never seemed so happy as when taking part in the recreation of the little ones and helping them by rewards to look upon the Sunday as, to them, the brightest and pleasantest day of the week.

The great difficulty Dr. Delaney experienced in this noble work for religion was to get a sufficient number of capable, thoroughly efficient and zealous teachers to carry on the work of religious instruction. The classes were rapidly growing in numbers. It was found advisable to extend the instructions to persons of more mature years than those for whom they were primarily intended. Young men and women, married and single, as well as those of the older generation, were clamouring for some of the spiritual food so liberally distributed to the children of the flock. Many willing workers gathered round Dr. Delaney to assist him in this apostolic work. Some of them, alas! grew tired of the labour entailed

by frequent attendance on Sundays in the parish church. As soon as the novelty and first zeal attaching to the role of teacher wore off or declined the helpers of the good pastor became smaller in number. He determined that it would be useless to depend solely on the help of voluntary assistants. What was really and absolutely required to ensure lasting success he had already formulated in his active and practical mind. He must gather round him a body of pious women who would pledge themselves to devote their lives to the good work he had inaugurated and established on a firm basis in Tullow. It was a project requiring anxious consideration and prudent procedure. If it were worth doing, it were worth doing well. As was his wont in all difficult crises in his life, he had recourse to his favourite devotion - the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar. He got the children to join him in his petitions before the Tabernacle. He felt that help would come to him from this Throne of Grace and Fountain of Heavenly Inspiration. It came in answer to his prayers and those that ascended from the pure hearts and lips of his beloved children. He made application to the Presentation Order, then in its infancy, to send him a few sisters to form a community, but his appeal was not successful, for, willing as these good nuns were to assist in any good work for Irish Catholics, their numbers were limited and necessary for the many charitable works in which they were engaged. The great Orders of Mercy and Charity had not come into existence at that date. There was no way out of the difficulty left to this zealous champion of the Faith but to found an Order of holy women, vowed to dedicate their lives to the instruction of youth and the care of the spiritual interests of the rising generation. He clearly foresaw the many obstacles that would beset his path in the successful carrying out of this most laudable project. Where could he find, in the narrow limits of the town and country that comprised his parish, subjects suitable for the religious life and capable, mentally and physically, of successfully laying the

foundation stone of a permanent religious order? With the best material at hand he determined to make a beginning. He put his trust in the protection and patronage of Him Who utilizes the weak things of the earth to accomplish His most noble and stupendous designs.

A ready and enthusiastic response met his appeal to the good and holy women who, without fee or reward, devoted their Sundays to the arduous and oftentimes trying task of teaching Christian Doctrine to the young people of Tullow. He was delighted at the hearty manner in which his proposals were received by his Sunday School teachers. They were willing to place their services at his disposal, not for a limited time, but for the rest of their natural lives. Some of them were poor women who could not give pecuniary assistance to him to carry out his project; many of them had only a very small share of ordinary education. They had however what, at the time, was most wanted, a simplicity of heart, a fervent desire to serve God, and a consuming love of their fellow-creatures. The seed was good; the ground was ready to receive it, and the prudent and careful husbandman, Dr. Delaney, was there to watch over it until it had taken firm root and brought forth fruit an hundred-fold.

Dr. Delaney was anxious to find a suitable site on which to build a new parish church, to which a convent of his Order of Nuns would be attached, so that the sisters might have access to the church without violating their law of strict enclosure. Bigotry was rampant at the time, and it was no easy task to obtain a grant of land for Catholic purposes from Protestant owners, who held the greater portion of eligible sites in the town of Tullow. He experienced a like difficulty in Mountrath, when he tried to obtain freehold ground for the erection of a Church in that town. The Protestants absolutely refused to part with an acre of their property, though tempting offers of purchase were made to

them. The good priest gathered his flock in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The welcome news reached him that a Protestant gentleman was willing to sell him a site for his church. The wife of this man received the grace of conversion. In her dying moments those around her death-bed were insisting on her having a visit from the Protestant minister so that, they said, "the disgraceful fact of her conversion might not be made public." "No," she said, "I will not; let it be known that I die a Catholic."

The Rebellion of 1798 interrupted the Bishop's plans for the building of his church and the erection of a convent for the nuns. When this political storm had passed over and the blessing of peace had descended on our Island, the good pastor set about the works that were nearest and dearest his heart. Not having been successful in obtaining freehold ground for the buildings in Tullow, he rented a piece of ground which he considered the most suitable for the objects in view. Having erected a new church and a small convent, close by, for the nuns, he determined to dedicate the congregation of pious young women he had founded to the Patroness of Ireland, Saint Brigid. The reason for the selection of this great Irish Saint as the Patroness and model of the congregation of religious women is given clearly in his own words, "She had been, heretofore, raised up and employed by Almighty God to fill the kingdom with religious Virgins." Six pious and thoroughly sincere young women were selected to form the first community of Dr. Delaney's Order.

On the 1st February, 1807, the Feast of Saint Brigid, the Order of Brigidines, or Sisters of Saint Brigid, came into existence. The sisters had spent the vigil of this glorious day in humble and earnest prayer and preparation. They assembled in their new convent on the morning of the feast. Their founder, now Bishop of the diocese, blessed the house,

said Mass in their chapel, and gave Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament. He then left them to pour out their hearts to God in humble thanksgiving in the presence of Him Whom they had chosen to serve for the rest of their days on earth. He returned in the afternoon and gave to each sister a religious name by which she was afterwards to be known to her sisters and the outside world; he then appointed one of their number Superioress, to enforce discipline and to watch over the spiritual and temporal interests of the young community. He wrote for them a daily rule of life which he insisted they should rigidly observe for their own personal sanctification and the edification of the faithful, who were watching anxiously the infant footsteps of this religious foundation, in which they took more than a passing interest. The Holy Rule of the Brigidines is written with a view to lead its subjects to the attainment of the highest personal sanctification by the path of love rather than by that of rigid austerities. The religious rise at 5.30 a.m. each morning; a full hour is spent in prayer before hearing Mass. The day is divided between schools, meals, recreation and spiritual duties. Strict silence is observed at stated times of the day. The Bishop, though kind and indulgent, was a strict disciplinarian where the observance of the religious Rule he had formulated for his nuns was concerned.

The community daily increased. Ladies of high education and endowed with wealth sought and obtained admission into their ranks. The Bishop was now assured that the blessing of God was upon his work; already the seed he had sown was showing itself above the ground, and the promise of a bountiful harvest was now well nigh realization. The convent was being gradually enlarged to accommodate those from all parts of Ireland who sought admission to this sanctuary of piety and good works. New Rules and Constitutions were drawn up by the Founder to suit the requirements of a rapidly increasing community and the

exigencies of a more extended sphere of labour for its members. In 1812 the sisters began to take Perpetual Vows - up to that year they had only taken Annual Vows. The enclosure of the convent was walled in and a beautiful temple erected, from which Benediction was given during the great Processions within the octave of Corpus Christi.

The sisters wore an entirely white dress when taking part in these Processions of the Blessed Sacrament; for a long time they preserved the custom of dressing in white on all feasts of the Blessed Virgin, Saint Brigid's Day, Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. Their ordinary dress when first founded was of black material, with white cap. The renowned Dr. Doyle - J. K. L. - gave them a religious habit somewhat similar to that worn by the Presentation Nuns.

Bound up inseparably with the history of the earliest beginnings of the Brigidine Order is the name of that great and good lady, Miss Browne, a member of a wealthy and distinguished Catholic family of Leinster. Her father obtained the high rank of colonel in the French army. Catholics, at this period, were debarred from promotion on account of their Faith if they accepted service in the army of England. Miss Browne was educated at the Benedictine convent of Ypres, in which two of her aunts were nuns. She acquired there a thorough knowledge of conventual life and discipline. She returned, on the completion of her education, to her ancestral home in Ireland, a beautiful and spacious mansion called "Castle Browne," standing on the estate of Clongowes Wood. After a short time spent there, she felt that the life of social festivity led by her brother and his family was not suited to her tastes. She longed for the peace and quiet she enjoyed in the cloisters of Ypres. She wished to devote her life to more useful and profitable purposes than an idle pursuit of the world's pleasures and pastimes. A woman of strong determination, combined with a spirit of prayer and a

love of good works for God and her neighbour, she realized, after much serious reflection, that she had no vocation for the religious state. Her desire was to retire to a convent and end her days there in the performance of good works and the practice of piety. She accordingly went to Tullow convent and placed herself under the direction of Dr. Delaney. She came at a time when her experience and services were most needed, for the community of Tullow were novices merely in all that pertains to the essentials and soul of perfect conventual life. They were, it is true, anxious to learn all they could about the religious life from experienced teachers. They were fortunate in obtaining the services of Miss Browne. Communication at this time was rare and difficult between the different convents in Ireland. Miss Browne was able to impart to them many details of conventual routine and discipline it would have been difficult for them otherwise to acquire. She lived and died in the peaceful retreat she had chosen. Her presence served as a stimulus to the religious of the convent to persevere in their sublime vocations and to shed no silent tear of regret for the sacrifice they had made in leaving all to follow Christ. They had before their eyes constantly the example of a noble woman who abandoned the comforts of home and friends, and all the enjoyment that riches can give, to live and end her days in prayer and seclusion. This saintly and devoted daughter of the Church peacefully laid down life's burden in the year 1840, at the patriarchal age of 98. The family mansion and property passed into the hands of the Jesuit Fathers, and is now known as Clongowes Wood College, one of the most appreciated of our many Irish educational establishments.

The zealous founder of this excellent Order of nuns watched carefully and paternally over its cradle. He saw this spiritual infant, almost hourly, grow strong and vigorous. For seven years he nursed it through the many changes and

vicissitudes attendant on the early days of all institutions. His heart rejoiced to see the strides it was making towards the realization of his hopes. He dearly saw that the foundations were well and truly laid, so much so, that there could not remain, in his mind, the least doubt as to the solidity and stability of this spiritual edifice, the work of his hands. He was so pleased at the progress made by the sisters in Tullow in carrying out his ideals, that he extended the sphere of their labours, by establishing a branch of their Order in Mountrath. He could now close his eyes in peace, for his glorious work was done and, as years have proved, well done.

A hundred years of zealous, unselfish, devoted labour in the sacred cause of religious education is the glorious record of the Brigidine Order today. The acorn sown by the hand of Dr. Delaney has grown into the mammoth oak, whose branches are spread over two hemispheres. Tullow - the mother house - Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Goresbridge, and Ballyroan have always been and still are perennial sources of untold spiritual blessings to the Catholics of Ireland. The work of the Brigidines has been carried on silently it is true, but none the less effectively, in all their Irish houses. The daughters of Erin, especially, have good reason to be grateful to the Sisters of Saint Brigid for the excellent education imparted to them in their boarding and day schools. This, the centennial year of their institution, will awaken in the hearts of many of their former pupils the sweetest memories of happy days passed in the classrooms of one or other of their institutions. Visions of the golden days of their youth will come before them, when the convent walls sheltered and protected them from the cold and biting winds of a world the bitterness and sadness of which they have had, alas! to experience in riper years. Midst change of scene and flight of years one memory will endure and loom up constantly on the horizon of their lives: Tullow,

Mountrath, Goresbridge, or Abbeylaxey, where their school-days were passed, will be clearly and effectively remembered when other places and incidents of life will have been obliterated from memory's page. If Tullow has been their Alma Mater, the convent buildings, the old-world garden with its wealth of flowers, the little cemetery where sleep many of their former teachers, the parish church where they lifted up their innocent hearts to God in prayer, will come before them with all the reality and pleasure of a stolen visit. The pupils of Saint Brigid's nuns have done credit to their teachers; they have given a lasting example of the advantages derived from a thoroughly practical and sound, liberal and religious education. With one accord, we feel sure, they will gladly join in the tribute of praise and appreciation we have endeavoured, in a small way, to bestow on such worthy recipients as the Sisters of the Brigidine Order.

The work and the blessings attending the labours of the Sisters of Saint Brigid have not been confined within the limits of the Irish seas. The missionary spirit of their Patroness, Saint Brigid, has been infused into the hearts



of her followers and spiritual children. The mission-fields of distant Australia have been, for many years past, the scene of their labours and triumphs. When the bishops of that land of immeasurable distances and unknown possibilities sought for assistance in the educational work they had resolved to carry out in their respective dioceses, they made earnest appeal to the Brigidine nuns to come to their aid. With an alacrity worthy of these devoted Spouses of Christ, they placed themselves at the services of the Bishops of Australia. There was no lack of volunteers for the Land of the

Southern Cross. The difficulty experienced by the Bishops was not so much in obtaining subjects as in making judicious selection, where all were equally eligible. Gladly renouncing all ties and bonds of affection that bound them, as with chains of gold, to their peaceful Irish convent homes and the land of their birth and love, they set out under the patronage of Saint Brigid to establish their Order in the vast continent whose shores are laved by the waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is simply short of miraculous the progress made by the Brigidines in the short span of years over which their work in Australia extends. Magnificent convents, large communities, well-filled boarding and day schools, excellent parochial schools, in every way abreast of the times and of the highest standard of excellence, are their proud possessions. It would be invidious to single out for praise any particular one of the many establishments of the good Sisters of Saint Brigid in Australia. The writer of these pages has had the honour of humbly participating in the missionary labours of the Brigidines in one corner of their mission-field - Echuca, on the banks of the river Murray - where the novitiate of the Order for the Province of Victoria is situated. The magnificent convent, built for the nuns by the Augustinian Fathers, who have charge of the parish, is one of the finest and most commodious in Australia. The writer well remembers the small and inconvenient house in which the sisters from Tullow took up their abode on arrival in Echuca. They set to work at once to organize the classes in a school-room that was ill-suited for its purpose, and there, patiently and perseveringly, they carried on their round of duties. The lamented Father Coleman, O.S.A., the Prior at the time, with his wonted energy, built a magnificent school for boys and girls, which is a splendid monument to his zeal and solicitude for the interests of the flock whose venerated and revered pastor he was for many years. In their boarding, day and parochial schools they have gained the highest testimonials to their efficiency and excellence

from the Press of all denominations. Many of their pupils have joined their ranks and have brought renewed lustre and added fresh glory to the name and fame of the Brigidines, as teachers and directors of youth.

The pioneers of the Brigidines in Australia were the Sisters of the convent in Mountrath, founded by Most Rev. Dr. Delaney. Most Rev. Dr. Murray, Bishop of Maitland, applied to them for a foundation, and gladly did they respond to his appeal. A brave band of missionaries left home and friends a second time, and settled in Coonamble, New South Wales, whence have gone several branches, the last of which is at Randwick, in the Archdiocese of Sydney, and under the special patronage of the Cardinal Archbishop. It is the Novitiate House for the Province of New South Wales. Abbeylax soon followed the example of Mountrath and Tullow, and there are now twelve houses of the Brigidines in Australia and two in New Zealand.

From his knowledge of the high esteem in which the Sisters of Saint Brigid are held by the clergy and laity of Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, the writer feels warranted in expressing the joy and gratitude that fills their hearts in this year of centennial jubilation. All rejoice at the event which marks a century of work well done for God's Church and for the spiritual benefit of past and present generations. A prayer, fervent as that of a mother for her child, goes up from grateful Irish hearts in Ireland and Australia - the newer Ireland beyond the seas - that God may continue to bless and prosper the work of the children of Saint Brigid, increase their numbers, extend their sphere of labour, and keep for ever proudly aloft in our own land and others, where the children of the Gael are found, the banner of Saint Brigid, Patroness of Ireland, now so securely and worthily held in the strong and valiant hands of her spiritual daughters - the Brigidines.

Lines on the Centenary of the Brigidine Order, and of Brigidine Convent, Tullow, County Carlow

For ages long our land in darkness lay,
And Druid rites held undisputed sway.
No star of Faith had shed a genial ray,
No praise to God could Ireland's children
pay.

Those Celtic souls, so formed for noblest
deeds,
Bore deep within, of brilliant virtues, seeds,
But dormant lay their gifts and worth
sublime,
Nor could to Heav'n their aspirations climb.

Then God looked down with loving, yearning
eyes,
From His high throne, beyond empyrean skies,
And sent a light ne'er seen on land or sea,
And willed that Eire a land of Saints should be.

Saint Patrick first and then Saint Brigid came
To give our land a rare, transcendent fame.
God's heralds they - both fired with glowing zeal,
To teach His doctrine and His love reveal.
And Irish hearts responsive, at their call
Embraced the Truth, nor recked what might befall.
And Erin, erst, with altars raised throughout
To heathen gods, then with exultant shout
Proclaimed to Heav'n no more her land to taint,
But make it rich in Scholar and in Saint!
She kept her pledge, and as the ages passed,
She sent her sons to distant lands to cast



The seeds of Faith, and win true souls to God,
And scatter blessings wheresoe'er they trod.

When sun is brightest there come low'ring clouds,
And dismal gloom the earth and sea enshrouds,
And thunders roar, and scorching lightning gleams,
And what was fair a blighted desert seems.
But sturdy oaks, which crushing storms in vain
E're strive t' uproot and bear off in their train,
But sink their roots more deep, and crests uprise
With richer foliage decked, to greet the skies.
So, when the storm of persecution came,
And foes, t' extinguish Truth's inspiring flame -
Did Erin's children torture, hunt and kill,
The torch of Faith in Ireland burned still,
And burns today as bright as e'en of old,
While other nations barter Faith for gold.

For ruling pow'rs had scarce relaxed the rule -
That Ireland have no God, no Church, no school -
Than stately churches, phoenix-like, arose,
Despite th' oppression of remorseless foes.
Of what more striking proof can there be need,
That "blood of Martyrs is the Church's seed"?

By Slaney's sparkling waters, in the Em'rald Isle
(Where tears for long, long years had dimmed the smile),
A saintly prelate, 1 zealous, wise and true,
Who'd nought but God's great glory e'er in view,
Whose heart was wrung to see the piteous state
In which his flock was sunk by adverse fate,
Long toiled with earnest zeal t' instruct and guide
Some faithful souls to labour side by side
To train the youth, and God's sweet law to teach
The old and young who came within their reach.
Those chosen ones, he led with holy skill

Their toilsome duties to, with love, fulfill,
And gave them rules, that they, e'er hand in hand
Might work for God and cherished Fatherland.
The holy band, which he had formed and taught,
Through weel and woe their baitle bravely fought,
And left a work their daughters carry on -
A work on which God's smile hath brightly shone.
For full one hundred years led by their spell
The Brigidines have proved exceeding well
How nobly upward they've pursued the trace
Their mothers left them in the heav'nward race.

But Erin's children, chased from hearth and home,
To foreign lands, by want, were forced to roam,
And seek in scenes beyond the stormy main
A succour sure t' assuage keen hunger's pain.
Saint Brigid's daughters, filled with ardent zeal,
Could not their pity, nor their love conceal,
They braved the ocean's treach'rous storm and wave
To help old Ireland's children's souls to save.
And now some work beneath the South'ren Cross,
And prize all trials sweetest gain, not loss,
To win benighted souls beyond the seas,
And teach the young their loving God to please.
In fair Australia, in New Zealand, too,
They prove themselves to their vocation true.

Oh, may their spirit ever lead them on,
To struggle bravely till their work is done!
And may their mothers from Eternal Rest
Look down and see their glorious work still blessed,
Their teaching by no hostile force confined,
But carried on by those they've left behind,
Their sphere extended far o'er land and sea,
Endure for many a future CENTURY!

- *Most Rev. Dr. Delaney, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin*

Prayer to Saint Brigid

Oh Glorious Saint Brigid, Mother of the Churches of Erin, patroness of our missionary race, wherever their lot may be cast I be thou our guide in the paths of virtue, protect us amid temptation, shield us from danger. Preserve to us the heritage of chastity and temperance; keep ever brightly burning on the altar of our hearts the sacred Fire of Faith, Charity, and Hope, that thus we may emulate the ancient piety of Ireland's children, and the Church of Erin may shine with peerless glory as of old. Thou wert styled by our fathers "The Mary of Erin," secure for us by thy prayers the all-powerful protection of the Blessed Virgin, that we may be numbered here among her most fervent clients, and may hereafter merit a place together with Thee and the countless Saints of Ireland, in the ranks of her triumphant children in Paradise. Amen.

+ Patrick F. Cardinal Moran
November, 1902



About This EBook

The text of this ebook, and the black and white photographs, are taken from the book *Saint Brigid, Patroness of Ireland* by Father Joseph A Knowles, O.S.A. of Saint Augustine's, Cork, Ireland. The edition used was published by Brown and Nolan of Dublin, Ireland in 1907. It was lightly edited to expand some abbreviations and acronyms for clarification; the bibliography and reference section was omitted.

It has the Nihil Obstat of Father R Connolly, O.S.A., S.T.M., Censor Deputatus, and of Thomas O'Donnell, C.M. It has the Imprimi Potest of Father Jacob Murphy, O.S.A., S.T.M., Provincial Prior of the Augustines, and of Archbishop William Joseph Walsh, Archdiocese of Dublin, Ireland.

The book is dedicated "to the Most Rev. Patrick Foley, D.D., the present illustrious occupant of the united sees of Kildare and Leighlin founded by Conleath and Laserian".

The cover image is a detail of a stained glass window, date and artist unknown. The window is in the corridor behind the chancel of the church of Saint Mary of the Rosary in Cong, County Mayo, Ireland. It was photographed on 4 September 2019 by Andreas F Borchert, and the image swiped from [Wikimedia Commons](#).

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